







JOHN WESLEY.

# JOHN WESLEY

## A STUDY FOR THE TIMES

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TO ROBERTS BARTHOLOW, M D ,

OF PHILADELPHIA,

**This Little Book is Inscribed**

as a humble expression of the author's gratitude for many

acts of disinterested kindness,

and in admiration of the personal worthiness of the

Distinguished Physician and

the True Man.



## PREFACE.

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THE little book now offered to the public is not a Life of Wesley ; much less is it a history of the great revival, of which, for more than half a century, he was the central figure. It is to certain features only of the great man's work and character that the author would direct attention ; features, which, though not made specially prominent by biographers, are yet the real elements of his greatness, and the true sources of the power which he wielded.

As a man, as a Christian minister, as the founder of the most rapidly growing religious body of modern times, there was a breadth and liberality in Wesley's aims and methods which distinguish him above all the men whom, up to his day, ecclesiastical history had furnished since the days of the primitive Church. We venture to remark that, as regards conceptions of the Christian life and of the divinely appointed mission of the Church, he was more than a century in advance of his con-



temporaries; and even to-day the great leaders of Christian thought are just beginning to catch his spirit. While these may not be conscious disciples to his system, and might even indignantly repel the intimation that in any sense they are his followers, a comparison of his views and principles with their own will reveal the fact that, in this nineteenth century, they are but treading along the path marked out by him more than one hundred years ago.

The present effort, on the part of many, to clear away the rubbish which the ages have heaped upon the teachings of Jesus, and restore the Church to its ancient simple faith and unity, is but a continuation of the work begun by him; and many of the views now advocated by the New Theology—falsely so-called—are the legitimate outgrowth of those principles of truth, freedom, and reverence for God above all human authority, which he so earnestly and persistently maintained. The questions, how much creed, how much deference to the fathers, how much liberty in the interpretation of the Word of God, are answered in that favorite expression of his, “We think, and let think,” and in his frank avowal to Freeborn Garrettson, that, if he had “plain Scripture” or

“plain reason for doing a thing,” that was enough. These “were his rules and his only rules.”

Should it be said that we have given only a partial view of Wesley’s character, the complaint will not be objected to, provided it means only that we have given but a part of what Wesley was, a part of what he did or said. This alone has been our object. We have desired only to show the illustrious founder of Methodism as the great, broad, liberal man that he was; and if we have done this truly, our end is gained.

THE AUTHOR.

SEPTEMBER, 1891.



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# JOHN WESLEY.

A Study for the Times.

## I.

### THE MAN.

WESLEY'S is one of the few names that shine the brighter as the generations pass. To-day, just one hundred years after his death, it is more favorably known, known to more people, and more highly honored perhaps, than that of any other ecclesiastical character since the days of Paul or Jesus. Within the last half or quarter of a century it has risen in redoubled splendor. Time was when the historian ignored the name, and the popular essayist seldom gave intimation of ever having known it. Cowper referred to Wesley in eulogistic verse, as

“The veteran warrior in the Christian field,  
Who never saw the sword he could not wield;”

but the reference made no mention of the name. The poet seems to have felt here as when he is

said to have made allusion to Bunyan,—that the polite reader might be offended if the name were written. The name had been despised by the dignitaries of the Church, and this was enough to make the poets, and generally the historians of the Church, pass it by in silence, or pass around it as if it were a thing accursed. Such, however, is not the case to-day. The historian, neither of the Church nor of the Nations, can now afford to write as if Wesley had never lived, and the grave philosopher dares not form his conclusions until the rise, progress, and full development of the work of Wesley has been carefully pondered.

Seldom has the same man appeared in so many and such diverse spheres of activity, and almost equally great and equally useful in them all. As organizer and controller of men, with “a genius for government,” according to Macaulay, “not inferior to that of Richelieu;” pronounced by Lecky to be “the greatest religious leader of the last century,” and by Buckle “the first of theological statesmen;” as preacher, scholar, poet, philanthropist, statesman, author, and publisher of books, he was easily the peer in attainments and abilities of the most gifted of his contemporaries; and equal

fame with them in any of these varied lines he had achieved but for his superior distinction as the originator of the greatest religious movement since the apostolic age.

While we shall not attempt to conceal our admiration of Mr. Wesley, we shall make no effort to show that he was a perfect man; and yet we doubt whether, all things considered, the Church of Christ has afforded, since the days of the Great Exemplar, one whose life has more nearly accorded with the high standard prescribed by Him. That he had his faults, however, we have no disposition to deny. He was credulous; he was superstitious; he would sometimes decide questions by random selections from the Bible; he made too much of certain events as special interpositions of Providence; he believed in ghosts; some have contended that he was ambitious and despotic. But, without further comment:—his superstitions were not such as affected moral character; they rendered him none the less observant of his responsibilities, either to his fellow-men or to God, none the less successful in the great enterprise which had absorbed his soul. As to his being ambitious and despotic, we can only remark, without either affirming or denying the



charge, that the world had been far better off to-day if it had had more of such ambitious despots—men sacrificing themselves in the effort to make mankind better by enforcing their wills in their various spheres, along the one line of supreme fealty to God. Mr. Wesley's faults were blemishes upon a great and noble character, but they have done the world no harm; and they can do harm only as we deal unfairly with them, as either by denying their existence, or by attempting to prove that what had been faults in others were no faults in him.

We shall not attempt a formal analysis of Mr. Wesley's character. We remark, however, that the predominating trait—a trait which we shall see manifesting itself under whatsoever light we view him—was, notwithstanding his long years of ministerial zeal and devotion, his remarkable ingenuousness and simplicity, both as to speech and demeanor, his manly, independent way of seeing things with his own eyes, and having his own ideas about them. Few men have shown less of the constraining or restraining influences of the ecclesiastical life. The conventionalities of piety no more than the conventionalities of social life controlled his habitudes of

thought, or fixed his standard of right and wrong. As a man among men he did his own thinking, and used as great freedom of both thought and speech as if there had been no higher authority than himself in all the Church or Nation,—guided by the one consideration of what was true or what was right.

While his zeal for religion—religion as he himself understood the term, love to God and practical good-will to man—was, we may venture to assert, more intense than that of any other of the world's great reformers, he seems never to have forgotten that "moderation in all things" is a cardinal virtue, and he would not himself commit sin by angry denunciation of the sins of others, or by decrying as evil that which in itself is harmless. We are not surprised, therefore, at finding his views of some things much less rigid than those of some of his disciples, whether of those immediately associated with him, or of those who represent him at the present day. As regards novel-reading, for instance, a thing until quite recently considered by many to be wholly inconsistent with personal piety, he advised young people against excessive indulgence in the habit, but he made no sweeping condemnation of it as

*per se* a sin.\* He himself would read a good novel when he had the time. Brooke's "Fool of Quality" he regarded a most excellent work, well calculated to teach the true principles of the religious life, and he actually had it published under his own supervision, for the improvement of his people. But this was a grave offense to some. The book was a novel, and that was enough for them. And so of the publication, in his magazine, of Prior's "Henry and Emma." That "many truly religious men and women," as Mr. Wesley remarked, "had read the book and been profited thereby; and that it was one of the finest poems in the language, both for expression and sentiment," did not satisfy the consciences of those in whose estimation there must have been some inconsistency between literary taste and the religious life, and Mr. Wesley had to promise that nothing of the kind should ever afterwards appear in that periodical. Tried by modern standards, he would be found wanting on the temperance question. The bishop of London had written him a rebuke for attempting, as the bishop alleged, to delude the people with his

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\* Works, VII, 244, (New York ed., 1831.)

superior sanctity in having abandoned the use of wine. To this Mr. Wesley replied that he had, indeed, given up the use of wine some time before, because he had come to regard it as injurious to his health; but that, inasmuch as he had ascertained that it had been thought by some that he had given it up for conscience' sake, he had resumed its use, assuring his lordship that if *refusing* to eat meat caused his brother to offend, he *would eat* it so long as the world should stand.\*

With sin of all kinds he was most uncompromising; but he would not force the recognition of sin where none necessarily existed, nor would he fix the conscience of others in matters as to which the law of God had not expressly declared itself. His ideas of "worldly pleasure" were such as all sensible men must entertain who have at heart the highest interest of their fellow-beings. This is equivalent to saying that he condemned all pleasures that were hurtful to the soul, but that he went to no such extreme as to single out particular actions, or mark the precise limits be-

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\* Works, V, 345. This was written four years after he made the *General Rules* which forbade the drinking of spirituous liquors. Mr. Wesley, so far as we know, did not explain his inconsistency; we attempt no explanation.

yond which no one should pass. As an observer of men and a judge of human nature, he saw that where this limit should be placed depended more on individual character and special circumstances than upon any arbitrary rule, prescribed for all alike. And hence "all diversions which can not be taken in the name of the Lord," was the only prohibition which he made in regard to such things,—leaving the matter to be determined by the individual conscience, or by the peculiarities of each separate case, at the same time making the rule so comprehensive as to strike at the root of everything that was wrong. He was, therefore, perfectly consistent in classing together the pleasures of eating, drinking, sleeping, dressing, dancing, the pleasures of the masquerade, theater, opera, park, levee, drawing room, as things which he himself could not participate in "with a clear conscience," and he was equally consistent when he said : "I am not obliged to pass sentence on those who are otherwise minded. I leave them to their own Master; to him let them stand or fall."\*

It is well known that above all the men of the British pulpit, he preached the duty and the

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\* Sermon on "The More Excellent Way."

privilege of extraordinarily high attainments in the religious life; yet he carefully avoided the fanaticism frequently shown by some. He was no such extremist as to denounce as sinful all the natural pleasures and propensities of the soul, nor to teach that one could or should rise above the infirmity, if it be such, that feels the power of temptation. To a young disciple,\* who seems to have been confused or discouraged by such extravagant conceits, occasioned, perhaps, by the follies of certain ones who had been preaching that they themselves had gotten beyond the power of temptation, or by the assumed sanctity of those who could see only sin in any pleasurable feeling except such as arose from a distinctively religious experience, he wrote: "All self-complacency or self-approbation is not pride. Certainly there may be self-approbation which is not sin, though it must occasion a degree of pleasure; . . . this joy is neither better nor worse for being accompanied with a natural motion of the blood and spirits. Equally natural and equally innocent is the joy which we receive from being approved by those we love." "The

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\* Works, VII, 90.

various thoughts and suggestions you mention are just such as any person of a lively imagination may expect. . . . These and a thousand clouds passing over your mind, prove nothing as to the state of your heart. See that this be devoted to Him, and it is enough.”\*

Though unfortunately calling by the name of “Perfection” the high ideal which he taught of the religious life, he held no such notion as, that one, in order to acceptance with God, should free himself from ignorance, mistake, negligence, or omissions, “which are, in a sense, transgressions of the perfect law.” On the other hand, he says most emphatically, that, “no one is clear of these till he lays down this corruptible body.”† “The perfection of which man is capable, while he dwells in a corruptible body, is the complying with that kind command, ‘My son, give me thy heart.’”‡ “To set the doctrine of perfection too high is the ready way to drive it out of the world. Let a man only describe it as implying a freedom from mistakes and human infirmities, and whoever knows there

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\* Works, VII, 90.

† Stevens’s *Centenary of Methodism*, p. 132.

‡ Stevens, p. 133.

is no such freedom in this life, naturally concludes there is no perfection. Hence we should always carefully guard against this, by insisting it is no more nor less than giving God all our heart.”\*

His ideas of religion, in general, though very exalted, were exceedingly simple. To him Christianity was a religion of “love, joy, and peace, having its seat in the heart, the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits; . . . continually springing forth, not only in all innocence, . . . but likewise in every kind of beneficence, spreading virtue and happiness all around it.”† He paid but little attention to mere doctrine in religion. “I am sick of opinions,” he writes; “I am weary to bear them. Give me solid and substantial religion. Give me an humble, gentle lover of God and man; a man full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy; a man laying himself out in the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labor of love.”‡ His estimate of doctrinal theology is seen in the following record: “Being§ alone in the coach, I was considering several points of

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\* Works, VII, 552.

† Works, V, 335.

‡ Works, V, 173.

§ Works, IV, 269.



importance, and thus much appeared clear as day: That a man may be saved who can not express himself properly concerning imputed righteousness; therefore to do this is not necessary to salvation. That a man may be saved who has no clear conception of it—yea, that never heard the phrase—therefore clear conceptions of it are not necessary to salvation; yea, it is not necessary to salvation to use the phrase at all. That a pious Churchman, who has not clear conceptions, even of justification by faith, may be saved; therefore, clear conceptions of this are not necessary to salvation. That a mystic who denies justification by faith (Mr. Law, for instance) may be saved; but if so, what becomes of *articulus stantis, vel cadentis ecclesie* (a doctrine by which a Church stands or falls)? If so, it is high time for us '*projicere ampullas et sesquipedalia verba*' (throw aside big, bombastic words), and return to the plain word: 'He that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him;'" which, in another place, he defines as "nearly, if not quite, the same thing as being sincere."\*

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\* Works, V, 239.

On a certain occasion he defined religion as consisting substantially of good sense, good nature, and good manners, all developed to their highest degree. A lady had asked him what else was embraced in the Christian religion, besides justice, temperance, and veracity? "What do you apprehend," he replied, "to be more valuable than good sense, good nature, and good manners? All these are contained, and that in the highest degree, in what I mean by Christianity. Good sense is but a poor, dim shadow of what Christians call faith; good nature is only a faint, distant resemblance of Christian charity; and good manners, if of the most finished kind that nature, assisted by art, can attain to, is but a dead picture of that holiness of conversation which is the image of God visibly expressed. All these, put together by the art of God, I call Christianity."\*

As taught by him, therefore, and as seen in his daily life, religion was not a far-off, mysterious thing which men of the world can not comprehend; nor was it of the kind that separated him from companionship with his fellow-men.

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\* Works, V, 11.

As might have been expected, his intercourse with men was easy, and without restraint, either upon himself or upon others. His presence cast no gloom upon coteries of friends; his appearance among them was not the signal that natural manners should be laid aside, while masks of soberness were to be assumed. He did not seek to solemnize the conversation by interjections of certain time-worn expressions, made more from regard to vulgar usage than to the demands of truth or duty. No man has been more free from all kinds of religious cant, "empty, solemn speech, implying what is not felt," and spoken when there is no occasion for it. He did not speak of the "dear Christ,"\* the "blessed Jesus," when there was no need of the adjectives prefixed, just as, in correspondence with friends, he did not subscribe himself "Your brother in Christ," "Yours in the bowels of Christ."

His conversations were not interlaced with denunciations of present evils as contrasted with the good old times when men were so much better than in his day. Even in extreme old age

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\* Works, II, 443.

## THE MAN

he was a striking contradiction of the senex as described by Horace :

“Difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti  
Se puero, castigatorem censorumque minorum;”

or, as elegantly rendered by Francis :

“Morose, complaining, and with tedious praise,  
Talking the manners of his youthful days;  
Severe to censure, earnest to advise,  
And with old saws the present age chastise.”

On the other hand, he was in all these things very nearly the opposite of what many have taken for granted that he was. Genial, affable, courteous, he was cheerily welcomed into all classes of either old or young, and was always a liberal contributor to such pleasures as were not inconsistent with his high calling. Cheerfulness was a prominent element in his demeanor. Near the close of his long life, he himself assures us that he had no recollection of having been low-spirited, or blue, for a quarter of an hour since he was born. “I never fret; I repine at nothing; I am discontented with nothing.”

Nor was he insensible to humor. “Did you laugh, John?” he asked of one, with whom the conversation turned upon a book he had been reading; “did you laugh, John?”—“O Earth,

Earth!" he exclaimed, when John had not laughed. Southey speaks of "that winning deportment, which arose from the benignity of his disposition," while his friend Whitehead says that, "easy and affable in his demeanor, he accommodated himself to every sort of company, and showed how happily the most finished courtesy may be blended with the most perfect piety."

An anecdote, related by a recent biographer,\* shows how, with the most scrupulous exactness as to his own and his followers' practices, he yet never lost sight of the proprieties of the well-bred gentleman. Invited to a friend's, along with one of his less cultured but would-be more conscientious brethren, the latter called his attention to the jeweled finger of a beautiful young lady who was present. Holding up the lady's hand, as they sat at table, "What do you think of that, Mr. Wesley?" said the aggrieved brother. "The hand is very beautiful," said Mr. Wesley with a kindly smile. That night the lady, jewelry left at home, attended the services held by Wesley, was converted, and became a decided Christian woman.

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\* Telford, p. 358.

“In conversation,” says one who had known him well, “we might be at a loss, whether to admire most his overflowing goodness of heart, or his fine classical taste and extensive knowledge of men and things.” Fully abreast of the times in all that teemed from the press, or occurred throughout the country, fluent of speech, and sympathetic with all that interested his fellow-men, he was capable of shining in any department of the social or intellectual realm. Had he enjoyed the leisure, he might have added new attractions to the famous club of which Goldsmith, Johnson, and Garrick were ornaments. “I could have talked all day, and all night too, with your brother,” said the great Johnson to Mrs. Hall, sister to Wesley; and afterwards to Boswell: “Wesley’s conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have his talk out, as I do.” The great lexicographer’s idea of Wesley is further seen in the letter which he wrote in acknowledgment of the latter’s presentation of his Commentary. After expressing appreciation of the gift, he alludes to Mr. Wesley’s indorsement of his views on the Ameri-

can question. "To have gained such a mind as yours may justly confirm me in my own opinion. What effect my paper has had upon the public I know not, but I have now no reason to be discouraged. The lecturer was surely in the right, who, though he saw his audience slinking away, refused to quit the chair while Plato staid."

The explanation of this high compliment lies in the great interest which Mr. Wesley, with his numerous engagements, took in all matters of a public nature. He was eminently a man of public spirit; more so, perhaps, than any who has ever occupied a British pulpit. The world was his parish in more senses than one. "*Humani nihil a me alienum puto*," he could say as truly as any man that has lived. No such fallacy as that which separates the pulpit from the duties of practical citizenship did he entertain. Citizenship with him was as really a part of the religious life, as was his connection with the ministry or membership in the Church of God. In his own words, there was the "closest connection between his religious life and his political conduct," the self-same authority enjoining him to fear God and honor the king.\* And true patri-

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\* Works, VII, 84.

otism—the right performance of civic duties—he sought to enforce upon all over whom he had influence. He advised his followers as to their votes at the elections. He wrote a special tract to the “Smuggler,” and placed among his “General Rules” one prohibiting the buying and selling of goods that had not paid the duty. At one time, when the country was in danger of invasion, or was apprehended so to be, he went so far as to make an offer to the government of raising troops in its defense.\*

He took interest not only in the home administration, but likewise in all that concerned the foreign dependencies; and here, as elsewhere, he had his own views of things. As to Ireland, he understood matters much better than most of the British statesmen of his day, for he had learned these important truths—that English penal laws were worse than useless; and that the religion of the people was a matter of race, rather than of education or of personal conviction;† while his letter to Lord North, 1775, evinces that he knew the American people much better than either his

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\* Works, VII, 81.

† Umlin's Wesley's Place in Church History, p. 95.



lordship or the British Parliament seems to have done. "My lord," says he, "these men will not be frightened, and it seems they will not be conquered. They will probably dispute every inch of ground; and if they die, die sword in hand."\*

"His keen eye," says Mr. Lecky, "was open to every form of abuse. At one time we find him lamenting the glaring irregularities of political representation. . . . At another, he dilated on the costly diffuseness of English legal documents, or on the charlatanry and incompetence of English medicine. He made praiseworthy efforts to put down, among his followers, that political corruption which was perhaps the most growing vice of English society. . . . He wrote against the right of Wilkes to sit for Middlesex."†

Besides the argument to which we have seen Dr. Johnson's allusion—an article of Wesley's on the American Rebellion—he wrote two other addresses on American affairs; several addresses on the state of things in Ireland, and one to the people of England. He wrote divers letters to

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\*Smith's History of Methodism, p. 726.

†England in Eighteenth Century, II, 685.

bishops, members of Parliament, and prime ministers, in all of which he shows to the world that, while a superficial observer might have supposed that of course his deep devotion to the cause of God had rendered him oblivious of mere secular interests, he was, on the contrary, thoroughly awake to everything of importance that concerned either the nation or the world at large.

His zeal for the public did not exhaust itself in the uses of the pen or tongue. He was no mere sentimental lover of his kind. Good works abounded in his life. Not only with tracts and prayers and good advice and words of condolence, did he seek to assist his fellow-men; no man ever more generously or more systematically employed the more material aid of shillings and pence. "His liberality knew no bounds but an empty purse." The story of the silver spoons will suffice to illustrate this feature of his character. When an officer of the excise wrote that he was a delinquent in the matter of tax upon his silver-plate—supposing that of course a man of Wesley's prominence was living in corresponding style—the latter replied that he had two silver spoons in London and two in Bristol, that this was all the plate he had, and he expected to have

no more while there were so many around him in need of bread.\* To the close of life he economized most rigidly that he might have the means of assisting others. When he had thirty pounds a year, he lived on twenty-eight, and gave away the remaining two pounds; the next year, receiving sixty pounds, he gave away thirty-two; the third year his income was ninety pounds, and he gave sixty-two; and in this way, his means continually increasing—owing to the sale of his numerous publications—he continued to live upon the small allowance of twenty-eight pounds, giving to the poor the remainder. A few months before his death he made the following entry in his journal: “For upwards of sixty years I have kept my accounts exactly. I will attempt it no longer, being satisfied with the continual conviction that I save all I can, and give all I can—that is, all I have.” (Tyerman.)

And he actually practiced medicine among the people. This was no shallow pretense, as might be supposed; it was a genuine business with him—except the money-making part—and in the main he seems to have been unusually successful.

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\* Whitehead, 490, 552 (J. E. Potter & Co.)

Of five hundred or more persons whom he treated, during the first five months after he announced his purpose to the people, no less than seventy-one—if we may credit Mr. Wesley's own account—were cured of maladies ordinarily considered beyond the reach of medical skill.\* He made a regular study of the science, seeking to improve in skill and knowledge, as if medicine were the particular or sole business of his life. He read new treatises on the subject as they made their appearance, and himself became the author of several works, one of which was so successful as to reach its twenty-third edition before his death; and an eminent physician in the North of England, who, long years afterwards, had employed the remedies prescribed by Wesley, declared that these were the most successful he had used during fifty years of professional life.†

More than all this, from house to house, as well as in classes, he taught the people. He was determined to leave no means untried of doing good. When his sphere of labor widened, he put to work his army of “assistants,” who were

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\* Works, V, 187.

† Telford's Life of Wesley, p. 338.

required to make the instruction of the people as much a part of their regular duties as were the reading of the Scriptures to them, and prayer, and exhortation. These assistants he himself trained as diligently as the nature of the case allowed, reading lectures to them at stated times, just as he had done to his classes when a tutor at Oxford. A remarkable feature of his teaching was his effort to liberalize their minds and do away with all "party zeal," "narrowness of spirit," "that miserable bigotry, which," he said, "makes so many ready to believe that there is no work of God but among themselves." He would even read to them works whose contents he could not indorse,\* most probably that they might see the strength of the other side, and would assemble, once a month, all who would come together, that they might hear him read accounts of what God was doing "in their own and other countries; not among themselves alone, but among those of various opinions and denominations."† This monthly exercise he found to be a "breaking down the partition walls, which either the craft of the devil, or the folly of men,

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\* Works, III, 619.

† Works, V, 182.

had built up," and an encouragement to every child of God to say, "Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

It would seem that some of those for whom he thus labored, were not willing to dilute their piety with knowledge taught by men, and objected that they "read only the Bible—the Bible was good enough for them." "Then," said Mr. Wesley, "you ought to teach others to read only the Bible and, by parity of reasoning, to hear only the Bible. If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul; . . . you need preach no more." To such as said they had "no taste for reading," he replied: "Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade." To those who "had no books," he would give to each, "as fast as they would read them, books to the value of five pounds."\* He was determined that there should be no excuse for ignorance, either among his people, or among their preachers. The preachers should teach the people; he would teach the preachers, and even supply their books at his own expense.

But let us now go back where we left off with

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\* Works, V, 223.

Dr. Johnson's estimate of Wesley. It need not be considered so very remarkable that the great converser so highly appreciated Mr. Wesley; it had been rather strange if such had not been the case. The strange thing is, that, with only fragments of time at command, as while passing, horseback or in carriage, from place to place, Mr. Wesley could have amassed such learning, or general intelligence as to current events, as entitled him to this high consideration. But the fact is, that while traveling from four to five thousand miles a year, and superintending personally every interest of his extensive revival, he was one of the most liberal scholars of his day, and one of the most wide-awake in contemporary history. "He was the peer," says Mr. Herrick, "in his literary attainments, of any literary character of that most literary period. No gownsman of the University, no lawned and mitered prelate was, intellectually, the superior of this itinerating Methodist."\* His acquisitions in the ancient classic tongues were unusually extensive, even as compared with those whose daily studies connected them more directly with such things. For

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\* Herrick's *Heretics of Yesterday*, p. 300.

the last sixty years of his life, his conversations with his brother Charles were ordinarily conducted in Latin, with a grace and an elegance which, it is said, would have reflected no dishonor upon the wits of the Augustan court; and so thorough is said to have been his acquaintance with the Greek Testament, that upon the naming of a word, he would immediately tell every passage in which the word occurred, with all its uses, and in all its various connections. When he undertook his "Translation and Notes on the New Testament," his determination at first was to keep before him no work whatever of human origin,—only the Scriptures themselves in the original tongues. His Biblical erudition, even in his earlier years, must have been extraordinary. We find his father writing to him in his twenty-second year, that he proposed issuing an edition of the Bible in the Hebrew, Chaldee, Septuagint, and Vulgate texts, and requesting the son to assist by the collation of three of these texts, and expecting that the Pentateuch should thus be examined in twelve months' time.

His Journal abounds with allusions to the Greek and Latin classics, and in quotations, which show not only that he was conversant with



the great poets, orators, historians, and philosophers of antiquity, but that he possessed the taste to appreciate their excellences. Here again we would make reference to his earlier days. When only twenty-three years of age he was Greek lecturer and moderator of the classes at Oxford, noted for his "fine classical taste," and "liberal, manly sentiments." "His knowledge of the classics gave a smooth polish to his wit, and an air of superior elegance to all his compositions." He appears to have delighted in writing verses in the old classic style, more particularly of the light, graceful ode, and in this line he gave indications of a genius of no inferior order. The true Horatian ring sounds through his imitations of the Latin bard, preserved by Dr. Whitehead. It is well known, however, that he did not limit his poetical effusions to such gayer efforts; he occasionally attempted, and with a success which makes us wish that he had more frequently indulged himself in such strains, themes of a loftier kind. One has only to glance at the Methodist hymn-books to see that John Wesley, like his brother Charles, was no ill-favored wooer of the sacred muse. "O God, Thou bottomless abyss," "Eternal depth of love divine," "Father of all, whose pow-

erful voice," with others of the most stirring lyrics familiar to the Churches, show that, whether as translator, paraphrast, or original composer, he was second to none in that bright galaxy of the sons of song that adorned the eighteenth century.

Farther advanced in life, Mr. Wesley tells us that he was then pursuing only those studies which served to the "advancement of piety and good life;" yet so broad and comprehensive were his ideas of "piety and good life," and so ready was he in transmuting his scholarly acquisitions into elements of spiritual growth, that words which might have appeared to imply a very limited range of intellectual employment, really embraced almost every branch of knowledge at the time in existence. His Journal shows us his readings extending far and wide through every domain of literature. In history, philosophy, poetry, romance, physical science, philology, equally with theology, he was at home with the great thinkers of all ages. At one time we find him criticising a new Hebrew Grammar, and then giving his ideas of Sterne's "Sentimental Journey." Walpole's "Doubts concerning Richard the Third" occupied his leisure, along with Beveridge on the Councils. *De Poesi Hebræa* is read with Thomas

a Kempis. Bolingbroke, Hume, Swedenborg, Hutcheson, Horace, Homer, Virgil, Phædrus, Statius, Tacitus, Plato, Aristotle, Livy, Irenæus, Eusebius, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Erasmus, Shakspeare, Milton, Pope, Gay, Prior, Young, Goldsmith—all, with long lists of others—are seen to have contributed to his mental stores. Besides this, we find him keeping pace with the progress of scientific thought; keeping his eye on the movements of the British Parliament and of the American and French Revolutions; studying the most recent theories of medicine; noting Benjamin Franklin's latest experiments with electricity, and arguing, at that early day, for its introduction among the other agencies of the healing art.

With all this, Mr. Wesley wrote and published books with a rapidity almost marvelous. He was one of the most extensive publishers in the kingdom. As author, editor, and publisher, he contributed more than any man of his generation—perhaps more than any one man of any generation—to both the literary and religious progress of his country. He edited a magazine, the first religious periodical of the kind known to history; abridged and edited many of the most

valuable works of the past; made original contributions to almost every topic of general interest, either in the political or moral world; and is acknowledged, even by Mr. Leslie Stephen\*—who seems in the main, however, totally to have misapprehended both his work and personal character—to have displayed “remarkable literary power” in some of these productions. With the exception of the mathematical and some of the physical sciences, he wrote and published on almost every subject of human knowledge. In practical theology, besides other works, he republished Jonathan Edwards on the “Religious Affections;” Thomas á Kempis’s “Imitation of Christ,” both in English and in the original Latin. He compiled the “Christian Library,” in fifty volumes, consisting of extracts, longer or shorter, from the writings of the great ecclesiastical lights—from Irenæus and Polycarp to his own day—thus reducing many immense folios and bulky quartos to “pocket volumes;” together with no inconsiderable number of original treatises, such as Notes on the New Testament, with his own translation; Commentary on the Old

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\*English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, II, 407.

Testament; several volumes of Sermons; and collections of Sacred Poems, largely his own and his brother Charles's composition; works on Baptism and Christian Perfection. He wrote and published extensively in general secular and classic literature. He published eight or ten editions of the Latin authors; wrote histories of Rome, England, and of the Christian Church; one or more treatises on electricity, just then taking rank among the sciences; a large Compend of Natural Philosophy; a Dictionary of the English Language; Grammars of the English, Latin, Greek, French, and Hebrew Languages; edited the works of Milton, Gray, and others; prepared several works in medical science, which held their own fairly with other like contemporary treatises; wrote on logic and elocution; wrote, as we have seen, divers political papers, and several addresses to members of the British Parliament.

A complete catalogue of his works would comprise five different ones on music, forty-nine poetical publications, one hundred and eighteen prose productions, several of which were in from two to four or more volumes; one of them, the Christian Library, containing no less than fifty

volumes;—all this besides what we generally call Wesley's Works, published at present in from seven to sixteen volumes, and the magazine begun in 1778, and to-day the oldest religious periodical in the world.\*

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\* Stevens' Hist. M. E. Church, IV, 458.

## II.

### THE PREACHER.

IF now the reader were not already more or less familiar with the life and work of Wesley, he would probably take it for granted that he had been reading of one whose profession had been that of literature or scholarship, or of statesmanship, perhaps. Hardly would he think that the foregoing is the account of one whose labors, through an unusually long and varied life, had been devoted to the preaching of the gospel, and that in its most humble and laborious sphere. But this is even so. If the expression may be allowed, John Wesley's *business* was to preach. His multifarious achievements, thus far narrated, belonged to his leisure moments, and were rather of the nature of recreation than of sober employment. His business was to preach the gospel.

We shall say but little of his preaching in its mere oratorical aspects. This much, however: The Church of Christ presents few men whose discourses more uniformly show this one element—an earnest purpose to inform the mind

and move the will to action upon the great truths of God. And the history of the world's great orators, from those of ancient Attica to the present day, can yield no more illustrious example of long-continued, persistent effort, controlled by a single aim, resulting in an achievement in which so many of the multitudes of the earth have a vital interest, and which will probably one day dispense its benefits through all the nations of the globe.

As to literary excellence, all that Mr. Wesley aimed at was the utmost conciseness and simplicity. In these qualities his style is most remarkable. One\* who had heard him often, tells us that he could not think of Wesley's preaching without recalling what Homer said of Menelaus:

“Just was his sense, and his expression plain;  
His words succinct, yet full, without a fault;  
He spoke no more than just the thing he ought.”

Mr. Southey represents him as possessed of eloquence of no mean order. It “reached the hard, brute heart, opened it like the Rock of Horeb, and made way for the living spring of piety which had been pent within.”

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\* Moore, *Life of Wesley*, Vol. II, 259.



But for the beautiful simplicity of their style, and for their generally practical character, it would be difficult to say wherein the power of his discourses lay. His delivery seems to have been totally destitute of the arts of oratory or elocution, and even void of what would ordinarily pass for energy. His "action calm, and voice natural, not loud, but clear and manly;" "style neat, simple, perspicuous;" always, as Mr. Lecky says, "preserving the language and manners of a gentleman," he addressed men from the mines and work-shops equally with the gownsmen of the universities, and reasoned of sin and judgment with the deliberation of a sage; yet the multitudes would sit riveted to their places until the seats gave way. Tears and groans would be heard on every side; old and young, of both sexes, would fall down, cry out, and swoon away, as conviction of sin on the one hand, or sense of pardon on the other, was experienced; and under his ministry, from first to last, and that of his assistants—most of whom owed their conversion to him—it has been computed that one hundred and forty thousand souls were converted to God.

~~We need~~ not speak of his laborious, conscientious work as pastor. Strictly speaking, he had

no pastorate; but, as he had made the "world his parish," to the world he devoted every power or resource he could command. From house to house he visited, from prison to prison, from county to county, instructing, persuading, exhorting, praying, administering to both temporal and spiritual necessities; and when the societies had multiplied beyond his ability to perform these services in person, he sent out his helpers, appointed stewards, leaders, trustees, exhorters, and set them to work throughout the entire circuit of the Revival—that is, in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, and America.

Scorned, opposed, persecuted, by high and low, by the righteous Churchman and the profane rabble; denounced from the pulpit and the press, ridiculed at theatrical exhibitions, satirized in drawing-rooms, and stoned upon the streets; with ample resources, living upon the scantiest income, that he might have wherewith to assist the poor; acting the part of physician to the bodies as well as the souls of men; receiving new members and disciplining the disorderly; giving private advice; writing letters of exhortation and encouragement to the "weak;" riding

through rain and storm to fill appointments which most men would have regarded themselves as “providentially” prevented from attending to; preaching more sermons than those generally who do nothing but preach; writing more books than most men who do nothing but write; reading more than those whose only occupation is to read; organizing and ruling as if this were his sole employment; stationing the preachers, administering the sacraments, instructing parents and children; advising the government as to her treatment of the “Colonies;” writing, editing, publishing works, tracts, and magazines, grammars of all the leading ancient and modern languages, hymn-books and histories, abridgments of bulky quartos and folios, and, in the midst of all, traveling from four to five thousand miles per annum; preaching four or five sermons a day, every day of the week (even at the advanced age of eighty-five, preaching eighty sermons in little more than half that number of days), and, in the entire course of his ministry, preaching forty thousand sermons, and traveling two hundred and twenty-five thousand miles—nearly ten times around our globe, and almost as far as the moon!—“the finest illustration,” says Mr. Her-

rick,\* “of consecrated, unselfish, wholesale devotion, for fifty solid years of this old world’s dark history, that the Church of Christ has ever offered to the vision of men, perhaps to that of angels.”

But, after all, Mr. Wesley, as a preacher, differed not essentially from other zealous, successful ministers of the gospel. That which really distinguished him was the exalted principle which animated and controlled him in the prosecution of his work,—supreme fealty to God and the truth. He loved his Church as dearly as any man in the British Empire. It has been said of him that “probably the writings of no eminent Churchman contain so many and so explicit declarations of attachment”† to his Church as those of John Wesley. Yet Wesley was no Churchman in the sense of placing the demands and usages of the Church above his own ideas of the right. He was more like some broad, liberal man of the world, loving God and his fellow-men, holding to his own opinions, and doing in his own way what he could to advance the cause of good morals and religion. His methods were fre-

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\* Heretics of Yesterday, p. 314.

† Umlin’s Wesley’s Place, etc., p. 50.

quently in direct opposition to the usages of his Church, and he formed his theological views as independently as if Councils or Convocations had never been known. The "fathers" he did not allow to prescribe his creed; for, besides their want of authority for this, but "few of them," as he said, "had much learning." "Some of them had not strong natural sense," and "none of them the assistance which our age enjoys."\* As to Councils, he was persuaded that both "particular and general Councils may err, and have erred,"† and are therefore wholly without authority to control the faith or otherwise bind the conscience.‡ In all things, both as to belief and conduct, his sole authority was the Word of God interpreted by his own best judgment. His test of any proposition was its accord with reason, and to reason, accordingly, he appealed in his studies of the Divine Word, as in all things else. "Faith," said he, "must necessarily at length be resolved into reason."§ "I do not believe it possible, without perjury, to swear that I believe anything, unless I have rational ground for my

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\* Works, V, p. 761.

† Works, III, p. 32.

‡ Myles's Chronological History of Methodism, p. 24.

§ Whitehead, 225.

persuasion.”\* By “reason” he meant “the eternal reason, or the nature of things; the nature of God and the nature of man, with the relations necessarily subsisting between them.”† With Mr. Wesley, an unreasonable or an unreasoning man could not be a Christian in the higher sense of the term. “So far as he departs from true, genuine reason, so far he departs from Christianity.” He desired, both for himself and for others, “a rational religion,” “a religion founded upon reason and every way agreeable thereto.”‡ To Freeborn Garrettson, of Philadelphia, he wrote that if he “had plain Scripture, or plain reason for doing a thing well, these were his rules, and his only rules.”§ Referring to those who decry the use of reason in religion, he says: “We can in no wise agree with this; we find no authority for it in Holy Writ; so far from it that we find both our Lord and his apostles reasoning with their opponents.”¶

A peculiarity of Mr. Wesley’s reasonings was the value he attached to facts as premises—facts as distinguished from preconceptions or foregone conclusions. Hence, his broad, liberal judg-

\* Whitehead, 225.

‡ Works, VII, 186.

† Works, V, 11.

‡ *Id.*

¶ Works, V, 12.

ments of men; his almost latitudinarian Christian charity. To men like Firman and Edmonson, the ordinary theological logic had allowed no true Christian character, the one being a Quaker, and the other a Unitarian; but Mr. Wesley judged by the logic of facts; and hence as to one of these he dared not say he "was not a pious man,"\* and of the other: "What faith, love, gentleness, long-suffering! Could mistake send such a man as this to hell?—I scruple not to say, Let my soul be with the soul of William Edmonson."†

But for this plain, matter-of-fact logic of Mr. Wesley, not only had he himself made a comparatively small figure in history, but Methodism likewise had been a far different thing, if, indeed, it had come into being. As is well known, Methodism is not a scheme of doctrine or polity, reasoned out from abstract principles. Methodism is an outgrowth of conclusions forced upon the mind by facts in personal experience and daily observation. Had Wesley reasoned from the Rubrics, or from established usage, he had put a stop to Maxfield's preaching without ordi-

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\* Works, II.

† Works, IV, 215.

nation, as also to Whitefield's preaching on the commons, and long ago the "societies" had been numbered with a long list of other futile efforts to revive the Church. Facts proved that Maxfield could preach without the bishop's hands laid on, and that Whitefield, in the open air, was even more powerful than within consecrated walls; and these facts were logic enough for Wesley.

We may refer, in this connection, to the readiness with which new measures were adopted by Mr. Wesley—measures proposed by others, even the humblest of his followers. This was due, largely, to his quick perception of the relations of things, and to his habit of judging these relations as facts seen in their own light, rather than as interpreted by mere usage or authority. Novelty or irregularity afforded no ground for the rejection of a good thing when it was in his power to adopt it. It is a remarkable fact that, from first to last, every important feature of the great revival sprang from the brains of others; not from Mr. Wesley's. The Holy Club was instituted by his brother Charles; Mr. Morgan led the way to prison visitation; from Spangenberg, the Moravian elder, Wesley first learned the doctrine of Assurance; Peter Böhler gave him his first



satisfactory idea of justification by faith, as from the same source, and from William Law, he learned what, as modified by himself, subsequently became the Methodist teaching as to experimental religion and sanctification; lay preaching was begun by Thomas Maxfield, and field-preaching by George Whitefield, as we have seen; band-meetings were introduced from the Moravians; the "societies" themselves had been a familiar thing in England for nearly a century when Wesley became a member at Fetter Lane; Howell Harris was an itinerant before Wesley had conceived such a thing; class-meetings were instituted at the suggestion of a Bristol brother; John Bennett drew up the plans for quarterly-meetings; the idea of sending missionaries to America came from the Americans themselves; John Gilbert, of Antigua, introduced Methodism into the West Indies; Miss Ball had had her Sabbath-school before either Wesley or Robert Raikes had thought of the matter; and Thomas Coke inaugurated the first General Missionary Society.

That Mr. Wesley should avail himself of these different agencies, and make them factors of the work in hand, he only needed to see that they would assist his cause and were not in violation of

the Sacred Word. That such things were new, irregular, or unclerical, had no weight with him, just as he did not object to them because others, not himself, had been the originators of them. Show him "plain Scripture or plain reason,"\* and that sufficed.

He desired to be "in every point, great and small, a Scriptural, rational Christian," according to "the clearest ideas of the Divine Nature and perfections." Whatsoever harmonized not with these ideas, or with the declarations of the Divine Word, he rejected with an independence and a boldness which to many would appear highly irreverent. It was thus he discarded Calvinism from his Creed,—Calvinism, both in the matter of Decrees, and in that portion of the Ninth Article, which would have us born under the wrath of God because of Adam's sin! Certain of the Psalms he could not harmonize with his "ideas of the Divine Nature and perfections," as revealed under the Christian dispensation; and hence, when compiling the Service for American Methodism, he omitted them, with the declaration that they "were highly improper for the mouths of a

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\* Works, VII, 186.

Christian congregation." He could not believe that Matthew had said, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet,"\* when the passage quoted could not be found in Jeremy; and accordingly when, in his translation, he comes to this place, he rejects "Jeremy" from the text, and renders "what was spoken by the prophet," remarking that the word Jeremy "was evidently a mistake,"—a boldness this, on the part of Wesley, which neither the late revisionists, nor any other translators, so far as we are aware, have ventured to display.

He would not interpret Scripture on mere human authority; no man's opinion could dictate to him the meaning of the Spirit, and no man's version could provide him with a text, except so far as his own unbiased judgment might approve. He desired to have the pure Word of God, uncorrupted by the glosses or traditions of men. Ready to begin work upon his New Testament, he went into retirement with only the original text and a lexicon, and until he saw the superior excellence of Bengel's comments, he was determined, so far as possible, to deny himself all human aid—reject

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\* Matthew, xxvii, 9.

all bias from learned or conventional authority, and to seek only the plain meaning of the Word, unfettered by all previous interpretations; free to read, think, interpret by his own conclusions; at the same time fully conscious of his liability to err, and freely admitting that he could not imagine that he had fallen into no mistakes "in a work of so great difficulty." He doubtless felt here as when he wrote the Preface to his Sermons: "Wherever I have been mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. I say to God and man, What I know not, teach thou me." "If I linger in the path I have been accustomed to tread, and am therefore unwilling to leave it, labor with me a little, and lead me as I am able to bear."

With such principles as these, it is not strange that Mr. Wesley sometimes changed his opinions. If one's mind be open to conviction, he can not easily remain long in the same beliefs, unless he either make no farther advance in knowledge, or cease to think; and yet, singular as the remark may appear to many, Mr. Wesley's change of beliefs is, in some regards, almost a solitary fact of its kind. He is one of the few men, of whom the history of the Church informs us, who have

seen things differently under varying light and evidence, and have allowed the world to see the record of their changes. It is a very remarkable fact that, of all the thousands and tens of thousands who have preached the gospel, there have been very few, so far as the world has known, who have not been, in all matters of belief, as firmly settled and as wise upon their ordination-day as when, after many long years of reading and of prayer for light and guidance, they have been called to their reward! But Mr. Wesley was a man who had to grow—grow in thought as he grew in stature and in years. He was a man whose beliefs depended upon the evidence which he had; and when the evidence changed, there was a corresponding change in his opinions. Not that every little breeze turned his mind—every little fancied difficulty or objection; but when, under the power of increasing light and the influence of an enlarged experience, he came really to see that he had been in error, that error he at once renounced, and adopted what, at the time, appeared to be more rational, more consonant with Scripture and with his own “ideas of the Divine Nature and perfections.”

See the changes his mind passed through on

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the subject of assurance, or witness of the Spirit. At the Conference of 1744—the first Conference which he held—he taught ~~that one could~~ not be in a justified state, or pardoned, and yet not know the fact; and this was established as one of the fundamental truths upon which the Revival should be conducted. It was not long, however, before he began to see the matter differently, and if the reader would note, in all the various passages, what Mr. Wesley has said upon the subject, along with the corresponding portions of Mr. Tyerman's volumes,\* he will find what many would call the most glaring inconsistencies; so much so that he would perhaps become offended with Mr. Wesley, and none the less with his biographer, for the fidelity with which the facts have been recorded. Suffice it to say that, shortly after this first authoritative announcement of the doctrine that no one is pardoned of God unless he knows, by the direct witness of the Spirit, that he has been pardoned, he candidly confessed that such an idea is "contrary to reason" and "flatly absurd;" "for how," says he, "can a sense of our having re-

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\*Life of Wesley, I, 190-195, 552; see Index to Vol. III.

ceived pardon be the condition of our receiving it?"\*

While he never ceased to teach that consciousness of pardon was an experience attainable by all, and one that should be sought by all, he wholly renounced the idea of its being an element of the pardon itself, or a condition upon which pardon is bestowed. Long years after he first uttered his mind upon the subject, he said: "When the Methodists preached, fifty years ago, that grand Scriptural doctrine—salvation by faith—they did not clearly understand that 'every one who feareth God and worketh righteousness' is accepted of him. . . . They frequently asked those who feared God, 'Do you know that your sins are pardoned?' and upon their answering, *No*, immediately replied, 'Then you are a child of the devil.'" "No," says Mr. Wesley, "that does not follow."† "When, fifty years ago, my brother Charles and I, in the simplicity of our hearts, told the good people of England that unless they *knew* their sins were forgiven they were under the wrath and curse of God, I marvel, Melville, they did not stone us. The Meth-

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\*Tyerman, I, 552.

†Sermon, CXI.

odists, I hope, know better now. We preach assurance, as we always did, as a common privilege of the children of God, but we do not enforce it under the pain of damnation denounced on all who do not enjoy it.”\*

Similar and equally radical were his changes of belief upon other points, both of doctrine and polity. Take him at the beginning of his career, study his views, purposes, and methods; then consider him as he draws near the close of life, and no two men in history can present appearances more dissimilar. Young, ardent, bigoted, the conscientious slave of routine and authority—“a Puseyite,” says James Freeman Clark, “before Pusey was born,” when he went with Oglethorpe to Georgia; broad, liberal, free, tolerant, the generous advocate of the spirit as opposed to the letter; preacher of the gospel of Christ as distinguished from all traditions or additions of men, when he ordained Coke for America, and liberalized the Thirty-nine Articles into the simple, Scriptural, rational Creed of American Methodism. What a ritualist he was in those earlier days in Georgia!—according to his own account, “so

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\*Southey's Wesley, p. 177. (London, 1864.)



tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that he would have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." And he was resolved to force upon those plain, unpretentious Colonists the entire ritual of the English Church ; even the long disused, practically dead-letter Rubrics must be revived. He would baptize infants only by immersion, except when life was in danger, and rebaptized all who had been baptized in any other form ; insisted upon rebaptizing even Dissenters who had returned to the Church ; would not permit a non-communicant to be a sponsor ; baptized adults by trine immersion whenever they would submit to such mode ; believed in baptismal regeneration ; refused the sacrament to one who had not been baptized by a minister of the Church of England, though he himself bore witness to the Christian character of the man ; insisted upon weekly communion ; would not read the Burial Services over those not members of the Church ; with the Romanist, believed in the sacerdotal character of the elder, the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, and in the idea of a divinely appointed and lineally descended Episcopacy. Such was John Wesley at thirty years of age.

Were he living now, he would stand in advance of the most ritualistic wing of either Anglican or American Episcopacy, out-Puseying Pusey, and equally Tractarian with Newman in the Ninetieth Tract.

But see the same man after he has once come to know what religion is! With him now, religion has little or nothing to do with form or ritual, and has but slight connection with the doctrines one may hold. Baptism is a mere form, and as such may be administered in any way the candidate may prefer; dissent from the Church, he still reprobates, and vigorously insists that his followers take no steps towards a separation; yet he fully accords to all Dissenters the true Christian character when their lives are without reproach, and refuses fellowship with none who love the Lord Jesus Christ; the Word of God and the decisions of the individual conscience he makes the basis of all belief and conduct, and teaches that if one reveres God, avoids all known evil, and, according to the best light he has, does all things well, he is accepted "through Christ, even though he knows him not,"\* and that one may be in the favor

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\* "Notes" on Acts x, 35.

of God, whether enjoying his written Word and ordinances or not ;” \* declares that “no man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mohammedan world to damnation,” † and even mentions Marcus Antoninus, the great heathen philosopher and emperor, who persecuted the Christians as being without fault—“one of those many who shall come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the children of the kingdom, nominal Christians, are shut out ;” ‡ displays a charity most remarkable toward those whom the Church has “stigmatized from time to time with the title of heretics,” often doubting whether these were not the seed God has always reserved for himself; inclined to consider Montanus, § “that arch-heretic, as one of the holiest men of the second century,” because “both his life and doctrine were blameless,” and Pelagius ¶ likewise, the “arch-heretic” of the fifth century, both “a wise and a holy man ;” rises above all prelatical bonds ; asserts equality with the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries of the realm ; actually ordains others to functions to which he

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\* Notes on Acts x, 35.

‡ Works, VI, 554.

† Works, II, 485.

¶ Works, VI, 740.

‡ Works, III, 353.

himself had not been ordained, and bestows upon these authority to transmit to future ages these same functions; claims for himself absolute superiority to all fetters that would bind the conscience; and when charged with inconsistency for still remaining in the Church, and thus setting at naught so many of her prescriptions, boldly declared that while he believed it would be a "sin to separate" from the Church, he regarded it equally "a sin not to vary from it" as he had done.\*

It must be noted that while Mr. Wesley thus differed with the Church in many of her most cherished usages, the Church itself took no measure toward his excommunication, and not even gave intimation that his withdrawal was desired. He lived and died a member of the Establishment; and though many of his preachers often urged the matter, he would hearken to no proposition that contemplated a severance, either of himself or of his societies, from the Church in which he had been born and baptized.

It is hardly necessary now to observe that the same freedom in the gospel which Mr. Wesley claimed for himself, he fully accorded to his fol-

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\*Tyerman, III, 636.

lowers. He not only allowed, he exhorted "all who would seek after true religion to use all the reason God had given them;"\* that "unless we follow the dictates of our own mind, we can not have a conscience void of offense toward God and man;"† that no man could compel another to see as he himself saw, and that no man should attempt such compulsion.‡ From the very nature of the human mind, he argues, there must be different ways of viewing the same subject; and inasmuch as each must accept the truth as it appears to himself, he must accord to every other man the right of accepting whatsoever appears to him to be the truth. "It is an unavoidable consequence of the present weakness and shortness of the human understanding that several men will be of several minds in religion as well as in common life. So it has been from the beginning of the world; so it will be till 'the restitution of all things.' Nay, further, although every man necessarily believes that every particular opinion which he holds is true (for to believe any opinion is not true is the same thing as not to hold it),

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\* Works, V, 12.

† Works, V, 8.

‡ Works, V, 89.

yet no man can be assured that all his opinions taken together are true. Nay, every thinking man is assured they are not true, seeing '*humanum est errare et nescire*'—to be ignorant in many things and to mistake in some is the necessary condition of humanity. Thus, therefore, he is sensible in his own case. He knows in general that he himself is mistaken, although in what particular he mistakes he does not know, perhaps can not know."\* "Every man, therefore, will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him, and will no more insist on their embracing his opinion than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs. He bears with those who differ from him, and only asks him with whom he would unite in love that single question, Is thy heart right as my heart is with thy heart?"†

"Private judgment have no place in matters of religion? Why, at this moment, you are appealing to my private judgment, and you can not possibly avoid it. The foundation of yours as well as my religion must necessarily rest here."‡

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\* Works, I, 348.

† Works, I, 348.

‡ Works, III, 283.

"Every one must follow the dictates of his own conscience, in simplicity and godly sincerity. He must be fully persuaded in his own mind, and then act according to the best light he has. God has given no right to any of the children of men to lord it over the consciences of their brethren."\*

No man more than Mr. Wesley recognized the broad difference between true religion and mere belief in dogmas. "Whatever the generality of people may think," says he, "it is certain that opinion is not religion; no, not right opinion—assent to one or ten thousand truths. Even right opinion is as distinct from religion as the East is from the West. Persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all; and on the other hand, persons may be truly religious who hold many wrong opinions."†  
 "He that, first, reverences God as great, wise, and good; . . . and, secondly, endeavors, according to the best light he has, to do all things well,—is accepted of him through Christ, though he knows him not. This assertion is express, and admits of no exception."

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\* Works, I, 349.

† Works, II, 20.

‡ Notes on New Testament, Acts x, 35.

“A string of opinions is no more Christian faith than a string of beads is Christian holiness.” “We do not lay the main stress of our religion on any opinions, right or wrong; neither do we begin nor willingly join in any dispute concerning them. The weight of all religion . . . rests on holiness of heart and life.” “Is a man a believer in Jesus Christ, and is his life suitable to his profession?—are not only the main, but the sole inquiries I make in order to his admission into our society.”\*

As before said, Mr. Wesley's notions as to the real nature of religion were very simple. “My fundamental notions are, that true religion is love to God and our neighbor;”† . . . “that truly rational religion, which is taught and prescribed in the Old and New Testaments; namely, the love of God and our neighbor, filling the heart with humility, meekness, and contentedness.”‡ “This religion we long to see in the world—a religion of love, joy, and peace—having its seat in the heart, the inmost soul, but ever showing itself in its fruits, continually springing

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\* Works, IV, 203.

† Works, VII, 404.

‡ Works, VII, 396.



forth, not only in all innocence, . . . but likewise in every kind of beneficence, spreading virtue and happiness all around.”\*

“You never learned, either from my conversation or preaching or writings, that ‘holiness consisted in a glow of joy.’ I constantly told you quite the contrary. I told you it was the love of God and our neighbor; the image of God stamped on the heart; the life of God in the soul of man; the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as also Christ walked.”† “Nothing deserves the name of religion but a virtuous heart, producing a virtuous life—a complication of justice, mercy, and truth, of every right and amiable temper, beaming forth from the deepest recesses of the mind, in a series of wise and generous actions.”‡ “Religion . . . does not lie in this or that set of notions, vulgarly called faith; nor in a round of duties, however carefully reformed from error and superstition. No; it properly and directly consists in the knowledge and love of God, as manifested in the Son of his love, through the Eternal Spirit. And this nat-

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\* Works, V, 335.

† Tyerman, III, 26.

‡ Works, V, 481.

urally leads to every heavenly temper, and to every good word and work.”\*

Quotations to like effect might be made without number. The substance of them all would be, that true religion is neither wholly an emotion, however exalted, nor wholly a life of obedience to the moral law, but a just union of the two—the one preceding the other as the fountain must be before the stream, yet the other following as necessarily as the stream flows from the fountain.

With him, faith is no substitute for an obedient life, on the ground that Christ’s merits have “paid it all.” On the other hand, it is an active power in the soul, arousing one to highest effort in a life of industrious zeal. “It causes him to put forth all his strength in obeying Him in whom he confides, so that he is never faint in his mind—never weary of doing whatever he believes to be His will.”† Neither with him is love—the love which he so often defines religion to be—a mere sentiment or “experience,” which one may describe in glowing expressions; it is a power which transforms the entire moral nature,

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\* Works, II, 182.

† Letter to Dr. Middleton.

and manifests itself in every relation of life. "It is fruitful of gentleness, tenderness, sweetness; of humility, courtesy, and affability. It creates modesty, condescension, prudence, together with cheerfulness and evenness of temper. . . . It is productive of all right actions. It leads one to an honest and steady discharge of all social offices."

"What, then, is religion? It is happiness in God, or in the knowledge and love of God. It is faith, working by love, producing righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. In other words, it is a heart and life devoted to God; or the mind which was in Christ Jesus, enabling us to walk as he walked."\*

Considering the plain, simple truths, habitually preached by him; the rational, Scriptural view he uniformly presented of Christian faith and life,—his utter want of routine or cant, on the one hand; his sincere devotion to principle, on the other; his honest, manly adoption of beliefs and practices, with perfect readiness to discard the old for the new whenever superior light or enlarged experience caused him to see things

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\* Works, VII, 223.

differently; his bold assertions of individual freedom and of the supreme authority of personal conviction, ever making reason and the Word of God the criteria by which he determined all questions and all authority; and holding forth the Christian life and character as the great essentials of religion,—considering all this, along with his unwearied fidelity and zeal in the presentation of such truths, it may be doubted whether the Church has had a teacher, since the days of Paul, who so fully and so faithfully preached the truth of Jesus as Jesus himself had proclaimed it to the world.

Again, taking account of his long life of self-sacrificing devotion, extending over the greater part of the eighteenth century, with the numerous agencies employed by him in the advancement of his great work, and at the same time the results accomplished by his own personal efforts and in his own life-time, it may no less be doubted whether the Church has ever had his equal, either in the abundance of labors performed or in the glorious success achieved.

### III.

#### THE REFORMER.

WESLEY now appears before us as the great *moral and religious* reformer. We would emphasize these adjectives because his design, from the first, had been, not the establishment of a new sect or Church, but the reformation of the Church of which he was a communicant; and the reformation sought was one purely of a moral and religious nature. Nothing had been more remote from his intention than the promulgation of peculiar views in theology, or the formation of a new creed. He was "sick of opinions," he tells us, and all that he desired "was to spread Scriptural holiness throughout the land"—holiness as seen in the improved moral condition of the people, and in the establishment of a purer life in the ministry and laity of the Church itself. "He hoped," says Mr. Southey, "to give a new impulse to the Church of England, to awaken its dormant zeal, infuse life into a body where nothing but life was wanting, and lead the way to the performance of duties which the State had blindly

overlooked, and the Church had scandalously neglected."

And this hope he did most effectually realize. Shut out from the pulpits as if his presence were a profanation; maligned, persecuted by both the higher and the inferior clergy, as well as by the civil magistrates and the mob, he nevertheless wielded a power which, in the course of a few years, created a radical change in the moral and religious character of those who had opposed, equally with those who had allied themselves with his endeavor.

It would be a great mistake to estimate the work of Wesley merely by the Churches that originated in his revival. These, great and influential as they have been as factors in the world's advancement, are but a portion of the work accomplished by him. It must be borne in mind that just as Martin Luther not only established Protestantism in Europe, but likewise effected a partial reformation of the Romish Church itself, so John Wesley, while he planted Methodism, both in England and America, upon a basis broad, enduring, and commanding, did actually revive the defunct hierarchy which turned him from its doors, and produced a refor-

mation in life and morals throughout the entire English Nation. As, since the days of Luther, no Julius II or Alexander Borgia has occupied the papal throne, so in England, since the time of Wesley, bishops have not had their card-tables, or rectors and vicars their fox-chases; no George II has wielded the scepter, no Walpole has been a premier of the realm. "If we were asked," says a recent Unitarian organ of Great Britain, "to name the chief instrument in the hands of Providence which has contributed most of late to the moral elevation of our people, we would not hesitate for a moment to say *Methodism*. The great awakening of our country to the importance of a righteous, sober, and godly life, took place last century through the labors of John Wesley."

Not only in England, but in America likewise, this reformation was effected. We make no reference at present to the ecclesiastical organizations which originated in Mr. Wesley's labors—only to the effect of those labors upon the general moral and religious condition of the people.

It would be well to inquire into that peculiar state of things which preceded and opened the way for the Wesleyan Reformation; and whether we consider the character of the English or of the

American people, we shall find it difficult to comprehend how, on the one hand, the reformation could have been delayed so long; or how, on the other hand, a reformation so radical and so extensive could have been accomplished in so short a period, and in face of circumstances so adverse.

In our own country there were many reasons why the demoralization should not have been so great as in the mother country; yet so different was the moral and social condition of our people from what we are now wont to behold, that to those who are accustomed only to hearing or reading of the better days of our fathers, a correct view of certain features of those earlier times must be very surprising. Not until Mr. Wesley had labored for near half a century was the first English Bible printed in America;\* not that Mr. Wesley was directly or ostensibly instrumental in having such publication made, nor that the want of such publication indicates that our people were a race of savages; but that a foreign press was our sole reliance for the Word of God; that when William Bradford, of Philadelphia, in 1688, and nearly a century later John Fleming, of Boston, proposed

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\* Bible Society Record, May 23, 1889.



subscription editions of the Bible, the latter on condition of receiving three hundred subscribers to the work, both efforts should have signally failed, is proof that at least little interest was taken in the subject. In those days it was no discredit to the fine gentleman that a large portion of his time was passed in drunkenness. The pious deacon, equally with others, used freely the products of his own distillery, sharing it liberally with the parson when he came around; and in one of the Colonies at least, the legislation was such as almost necessarily to promote drunkenness; as when, for instance, the employer was allowed to pay off his employees in ardent spirits, which the latter must accept under prohibition of selling to others—the employees, therefore, drinking the liquor to keep from losing the reward of their labors! The fine gentleman was, likewise, a devotee to the gaming-table, and the equally fine lady was no stranger to the sport—the gentleman's honor, at the same time, being so sacred that the least imputation of stain could be effaced only by another gentleman's blood, the duel being fought with little more regard to the rectitude of the thing than if it were a game of chess; while the fine lady felt honored by the

attentions of those who "had slain their man," and not rarely was the willing occasion of the deed.

The condition of the Church, if we may judge from the letter of a Virginia clergyman to Mr. Wesley, was in full accord with that of the social state. "Virginia has long groaned," wrote Rev. Mr. Jarratt in 1773, "through a want of faithful ministers of the gospel. Many souls are perishing for lack of knowledge. . . . We have ninety-nine parishes in the Colony, and all except one, I believe, are supplied with clergymen; but alas!—you well understand the rest. I know of but one clergyman of the Church of England who appears to have the power and spirit of vital religion."\* The zeal and fidelity of these ministers of the gospel are seen in the fact that, when the War of the Revolution began, the larger portion of them abandoned their flocks to the wolves, and betook themselves to the more secure and peaceful shelterings of the mother country.

In addition to the comparatively low moral state of society, and the indifference of the

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\* Stevens's Hist. M. E. Church, Vol. I, 183.

Church, and, what was equally unfortunate, the hard, despotic religion of some of the sects—infidel sentiments were making no slow advance among the people. French ideas were affecting the minds, especially of the more intelligent classes, so that in many parts, atheism and infidelity were almost the fashion of the times. That the general tendency of things was adverse, both to theoretical and practical morals, as well as to religion, no one can deny; neither can it be denied that the influence of Wesley had much to do with checking the downward progress. Webb, Pilmoor, Williams, Rankin, Asbury, and others, followers of Wesley, had come to the Colonies, and this meant a zeal and devotion in the cause of good morals and religion, such as the Colonies had never known. The Colonies had known zeal in what appeared to them to be *principle*, or adherence to conviction in the line of theological or ecclesiastical polity. The Mayflower and Plymouth Rock, the persecution of Romanists and Quakers, and the banishment of Roger Williams, with sundry enactments of Sabbath legislation and other like instruments—safeguards to piety—had long borne ample testimony to this kind of zeal; but to the men of whom we write, all

such things were as remote from their views or purposes, as had been the renewal of the Salem witchcraft horrors, or the extermination of the Indians. Faith in God and repentance of sin these men had come to preach, and in an incredibly short time the whole land was made to hear their voices. The itinerant was abroad from New Brunswick to the farthest South; and while he had but little to say in learned phrase of the questions at issue between disbelievers and the followers of Jesus, he was, wherever he went, a bold denouncer of sin, and he earnestly pleaded with men to repent. And they did repent. In the cities, in the villages, in the wild woods, men called upon God. By the time our Federal Constitution had been formed there was hardly a county in the land, which had not had its "society," its preachers, and leaders, with their lay members, if these may be so designated where all alike were equally without ecclesiastical sanction, all zealously at work for the uprooting of sin from the people. Not theological essays, not arguments for Church or creed—only the appeal to forsake sin and cling to righteousness—was the burden of their preaching; and to-day those organizations which are doing most in the land to

suppress vice, to elevate the ignorant and the poor, to educate the Indian and the Negro, to enforce the sanctity of the Sabbath, to guard public legislation in the ways of morality and religion, together with the generally staid and conservative character of our people, must be ascribed largely to the influence, direct or indirect, of John Wesley and his followers. Much more marked was this influence in England. From a variety of causes, morality and religion were there at a much lower ebb.

In order to understand this period of English history, we should bear in mind that, for more than two centuries before the birth of Wesley, the condition of the English, like that of the other European nations, had been anything but favorable to the cultivation and growth of true religion. When we consider how much of the superstition and of the empty, unscriptural ecclesiasticism of Rome had remained in the Church; how the little genuine religion of the sixteenth century had been chilled by the theological controversies following and arising out of the Reformation, and afterwards by the Puritanic asceticism and hypocrisies of the days of Elizabeth and the first James, and then, again, by the polit-

ical and religious disturbances of the reign of Charles, followed by the profligacy of the court of the son, who, after the Commonwealth, had succeeded to the throne,—when these things are considered, it can not be surprising that, at the time Wesley appeared upon the scene, there should have been no very high standard either of practical morality or of theoretical truth in matters either of a social or of a religious nature. Indeed, atheism and infidelity had well-nigh usurped the place of a correct evangelical belief; and in practical life, whether of the nation at large or of the Church, it may be said that iniquity abounded. The court was still displaying the licentious aspect of the reign of the second Charles; the clergy were almost equally lax, both in life and doctrine, and many of them shamefully ignorant of the first principles of the religion they professed to teach. Few writers, either contemporary or of subsequent days, who have had occasion to touch upon the subject, have failed to represent the times as most sadly out of joint. “England, at the period of which I now write,” says Edward Wortley Montague—himself a witness of what he declares—“was the ape of France; and as almost any crime which Juvenal

enumerates or Suetonius describes or man imagines, was practiced with open impunity by the Gauls, so it came to pass that in our own country also it was thought unfashionable to be decent and good-breeding to be impudent.”\* Behold a picture of the society of those days, drawn by Thackeray: “As I peep into George II’s St. James, I see crowds of cassocks rustling up the back-stairs of the ladies of the court; stealthy clergy slipping purses into their laps; the godless old king, yawning under his canopy in his chapel-royal, as the chaplain before him is discoursing. Discoursing about what? About righteousness and judgment. While the chaplain is preaching, the king is chattering in German as loud as the preacher; so loud that the clergyman . . . actually bursts out crying, because the defender of the faith and dispenser of bishoprics would not listen to him. No wonder that the clergy were corrupt and indifferent amidst this indifference and corruption! No wonder that skeptics multiplied and morals degenerated!” . . . “I am scared when I look around at this society, at this king, at these courtiers, at these politicians,

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\* Autobiography of E. W. Montague, Vol. I, p. 62.

at these bishops, at this flaunting vice and levity."\*

How different the English people of to-day! Different, as if a new religion, a new system of morals, a new Deity, new principles of self-respect and personal responsibility, had been working among them for a century or more; and the British court, with its ruling ideas of manners and morals, is no more like that of Charles II, or of the great royal head when Wesley came into prominence, than is the American Congress like the senate of Nero or Caligula.

The effect of Wesley's efforts **at** reformation was almost immediate. He had not preached more than a score of years before the improvement of British society was most marked. Montague, from whom we have just quoted, died in 1761; yet he had lived long enough to testify, evidently with no small degree of satisfaction, that Wesley had "stemmed the tide" of degeneracy, and introduced a better state of things. "These three kingdoms," writes another contemporary of Wesley, "have been pervaded by the

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\* Lectures on the Four Georges, p. 73 of "Half-Hour Series."



influence of his ministry, and by the ministry of those who have labored with him, in a manner that is astonishing. Its power has been felt, not only in the cities, but even in the smallest villages; it has reached the bottom of the mines.” “In the nation at large,” says Mr. Green, the historian,\* “appeared a new moral enthusiasm, which, rigid and pedantic as it often seemed, was still healthy in its social tone, and whose power was seen in the disappearance of the profligacy which had disgraced the upper classes, and the foulness which had infected literature ever since the Reformation.”

We need not give a more extended account of this portion of Mr. Wesley’s work. It is enough to say that to-day no nation of the globe exhibits a more virtuous or intelligent court; a more upright legislature, including both the lords and commons; a more sober, earnest, industrious working-class; a more learned or highly respected ministry,—than are these different classes in Great Britain.

Indeed, that generally staid, sober, reliable character, which to-day marks the English people,

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\* History of English People.

is, in no small degree, due to influences set to work by this Revival. Not that this character was created by such influences, but that the character which had for generations distinguished them among the nations, was thus conserved and improved. But for this great moral awakening, it is a very serious question whether England could have risen above even the political degeneracy which French thought had been rapidly introducing. In the days preceding their Revolution the Encyclopedists had published to the world, in their peculiarly forcible and fascinating style, opinions that antagonized all government; tended to subvert the foundations of society; and did actually, in their own land, for a period, demolish the very Church of God. Under this influence large numbers, in all the leading nations, began to question, if not indeed to despise, everything that was deemed sacred except their own ideas of human rights, which rights they would have had to consist largely of the liberty to rebel against all authority, human or divine; to challenge every public or private virtue; to denounce every instrument of society, government, or religion that stood in the way of their own anarchical ideas. The extent to which such principles were

advancing in England can not now be appreciated without a more extended study than we can here make of the subject. What we would say is, that nothing had more power in checking their advancement than the Wesleyan Revival. Mr. Lecky is, we believe, the first writer who has called attention to this fact. While he allows that many causes interfered to save the nation from what seemed to be the inevitable result, he yet tells us that among these causes, "a prominent place must be given to the new and vehement religious enthusiasm which was at the time passing through the middle and lower classes of the people," by which enthusiasm he means the zeal aroused by Mr. Wesley and those who, to greater or less degree, had shared his spirit.

The like testimony is borne by Mr. Overton,\* canon of Lincoln and rector of Epworth: "It was of incalculable benefit to the nation that just such a power as Methodism existed at the time when otherwise the revolutionary torrent would have swept away multitudes in its course. In fact, Methodism was a sort of safety-salve, through which many let off their superfluous steam. Many

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\*Evangelical Revival in Eighteenth Century, p. 141.

a man who, under different circumstances, would have been haranguing about the rights of man, was happily preoccupied with a far more noble subject—the love of God. John Wesley and John Fletcher . . . did not live long enough to see the more destructive effects of the revolutionary spirit in France; but they fully impressed their loyal and conservative spirit upon their followers; and none of the Methodists showed the slightest trace of sympathy with revolutionary principles in England. . . . As to the Evangelicals, they were anti-revolutionary to a man, and contributed much towards keeping the upper classes free from the contagion.”

Let us now turn aside to note, for a moment, some of the more positive—at least, more visible—effects of Wesley’s life upon the advancement of the world at large. We shall thus observe a number of new activities, without which at the present day it would appear that the world had scarcely emerged from barbarism. Instead of the incendiary ideas of the French, and the cold indifference of the other nations, new ideas of the dignity and worth of human nature, and of the ties binding into one the different classes of society, have, during the last century, not only

found their way into the public mind, but have left their lasting impress upon the legislation of the nations. It is very noticeable how prominent the word *philanthropy* has become in the more recent accounts of the work of Wesley. We now call attention only to those measures which, though the outgrowth of Christian effort, and really the highest manifestations of the religious life, are yet generally classed among enterprises of a civil or political nature; or, at best, as moral or humanitarian. Indeed, it would seem as if, before the days of which we are speaking, very seldom had anything like a broad, unselfish policy been dreamed of as affecting the welfare of the race at large, or as benefiting man solely upon the basis of his humanity. Philanthropy, in the true sense, would seem to have been a new term in the lexicon; the statesman had had but little use for it, and the average theologian had had less. But, as a consequence of the Revival by Mr. Wesley, "many philanthropic efforts," according to Mr. Lecky,\* "soon became topics of Parliamentary debate;" or, as Mr. Green

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\* Lecky's *England in Eighteenth Century*, Vol. II, p. 690.

has it,\* “a new moral enthusiasm” appeared—  
“a new philosophy reformed our prisons, abolished the slave-trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education.”

Let us take these words of the historian, and see to what extent they are true. Mr. Wines, in his “State of Prisons,” agrees with the writer just quoted, in making Wesley one of the earliest laborers for the reform of prisons. Debtors and criminals of the worst character were mistreated alike in the gaols. “A new philosophy,” says Mr. Green, “reformed our prisons.”

Until a comparatively recent date, it is almost incredible the way in which both the British and American prisons were conducted, and the general severity with which criminals of all kinds were punished. “The criminal laws were savage, and they were administered in a spirit appropriately relentless. The feeling of the time was so entirely in favor of severity that Edmund Burke said he could obtain the assent of the House of Commons to any bill imposing the punishment of death. . . . Our law recognized two hundred and twenty-three capital offenses. . . . If a

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\* History of English People, Vol. IV, p. 149.

man injured Westminster Bridge, he was hanged. If he appeared disguised on a public road, he was hanged. If he cut down young trees, if he shot at rabbits, if he stole property valued at five shillings, if he stole anything at all from a bleach-field, if he wrote a threatening letter to extort money, if he returned prematurely from transportation,—for any of these offenses, he was immediately hanged.”\*

But that which most nearly concerns us now is the prison-life of those days. The fact that the jailer received no salary; that his remuneration came from fees, “extracted at his own pleasure, and often by brutal violence, from the wretches who had fallen into his power;” that the food which the prisoners ate, the straw they slept on, with every other sorry comfort enjoyed by them, was purchased at the extortionate price demanded; and even acquittal of the offense charged secured no release until further fees were paid for the opening of the prison doors,—such facts render unnecessary any description of the life within the cells. Speaking of Newgate prison, Mr. Wesley says: “I know not if to one

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\*Mackenzie's *Nineteenth Century*, pp. 77, 78.

of a sensible, thinking turn of mind, there could be anything like it this side hell."

From Mr. Wines's book, just referred to, it may be seen that the matter was no better in our own country, either as regards the severity of the penal code, or the treatment of those under arrest.

Now, while it will not do to say that the reform of the foregoing evils has by any means been yet accomplished, nor to say that Mr. Wesley had labored specially or conspicuously for such reformation as has been made, yet the work of reform has been carried to such an extent as to have become a chief consideration with all leading governments; and Mr. Green is certainly correct in tracing the advance to the life and work of Wesley.

It is the name of Howard which will most adorn the page of history which treats this subject; but it must not be forgotten that thirty years or more before Howard began his efforts, John Wesley, with his *confreres* of the Holy Club, had devoted themselves in earnest, personal effort to the amelioration of prison horrors; and by their pious labors, followed by the revival of which Wesley was the head and front, prepared



the way for, and rendered practicable, what had doubtless otherwise been an abortive though noble effort of the great philanthropist.

“Abolished the slave-trade.” Such was another result of the work of John Wesley. The Methodist effort in behalf of the slave has been conspicuous from the first. It is a remarkable fact that Mr. Wesley’s earliest utterances upon the subject of slavery were made in the same year\* that Granville Sharp began the agitation for the abolition of this curse to civilization and religion. Fifteen years before the organization of the Society for the Suppression of the Slave-trade; sixty years before the abolition of slavery in the British dominions; almost a century prior to its extinction in the United States, Mr. Wesley had written of the traffic in slaves as “that execrable sum of all villainies,” and one of the last acts of his life was writing letters of sympathy and encouragement to Wilberforce, who had now succeeded in bringing the subject before Parliament: “Go on in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish

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\* 1772.

away." He had previously written to Thomas Clarkson, who was devoting his life to the movement, and promised all the aid he could afford in the accomplishment of his noble purpose. Mr. Wesley lived to see only the faintest beginnings of the enterprise into which he had so earnestly thrown his soul. But his influence was not lost. His brethren in America had caught his spirit, and began to labor for the extinction of what one of their earliest Conferences declared to be "an evil contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature; . . . contrary to the dictates of conscience and of pure religion."

The influence of Methodism in the extermination of slavery in our own country, is too well known to demand, or even admit, further consideration. Her pulpits, her prayers, her silver and gold, her blood, were freely offered in behalf of freedom; and to-day, even in those parts where slavery had most numerous advocates, and was by many, in all sincerity, held to be of divine origin, few can be found who would have the "institution" restored if they could—none who would contend for the divine appointment of slavery. In England and her vast empire, it was Wilberforce and Clarkson who broke the

shackles of the slave; in America it was John Wesley and his preachers. American Methodism has the honor of being the first ecclesiastical body which, through the long ages of Christian progress, took legislative action in behalf of universal human freedom. Apart from his labors in what is most strictly called the cause of Christ, Wesley's name and record are on high. With Wilberforce, Clarkson, Howard, and other benefactors of the race, his name will reach the remotest ages, and his work will abide while sun and moon endure.

The Wesleyan movement "gave the first impulse to popular education." So says the great English historian; so says Mr. Stopford Brooke, in his valuable little work on English literature.

We have already noted Mr. Wesley's efforts in this direction. These efforts were of the most liberal character; they were neither sectarian nor ecclesiastical; their aim was higher than mere zeal for Church or sect could have inspired. Education into the doctrines and usages of the Church had for centuries been the work of pastors; but Mr. Wesley, as already said, was at the farthest possible remove from the mere ecclesiastical character. He was both taller and broader

than the Churchman; in the truest sense of the term, he was a Christian man and a Christian teacher. He placed a higher estimate upon men than membership in the Church; set principle above sectarianism, religion above the National Church; and hence in his labors for the intellectual elevation of the race there was the breadth, liberality, and philanthropy of the generous citizen or patriotic statesman, rather than the aims of one seeking to enlarge the power of a single ecclesiastical organization. Mr. Wesley was the first man in Great Britain who personally adopted measures for the education of the masses. Long before the subject had come to be seriously considered, either by statesman or philanthropist, he had devoted himself earnestly to the work. He announced no theories upon the subject, expended no rhetoric, laid no measures before Parliament or ministers; indeed, it was a peculiarity of the man that he did not theorize, and before he called upon others, either in public or private, to lend aid to any enterprise, he had himself devoted his energies, and had accomplished much before the world became aware that the idea had originated. Without word of exhortation, or even of announcement to others, quietly, res-

olutely, he went to work ; he taught, wrote and published books ; gave books when the people could not buy ; and to such as could and did make the purchase he reduced the cost to a minimum, thus anticipating, by more than a century, the great work now done by many of the large publishing-houses in supplying the people with good, healthy literature, and popularizing learning in the same way as he had popularized religion. Besides this, early in the course of his Revival he had established at Kingswood a school, not only for the education of sons of the ministers, and the training of young men for the preaching of the gospel, but likewise for those of maturer years who desired to make up the deficiencies of their earlier days. The course of study in this institution was of the broadest, most comprehensive range, such as in Wesley's own estimation would make a better scholar than nine in ten of the graduates at Oxford or Cambridge ; just such a course as, adapted to advancing thought and scholarship, will most probably, at some future day, be seen to be the best for the theological schools of the country ; a course of wide, general culture, including the Scriptures in their original tongues, with other works bearing upon moral

and religious education, but without the sectarian or distinctively theological features.

From the establishment of that Kingswood school to the present day, the followers of Wesley have, in the main, been not only forward but foremost in providing for the education of the people. Just as ordinarily the Methodist preacher has pioneered the way into new communities with his hymn-book and Bible, and has been the first to erect a place of worship, so he has generally built the first school-house and secured the first teacher, and in the selection of teachers has usually shown more of the broad catholic spirit and true desire to promote learning, than mere regard for denominational expansion. Others have done more for the higher education of the wealthier, more intelligent classes; but among the poor, the ignorant, and the sparsely settled tracts of our country and of the world, it is Methodism that has wrought with earliest and most earnest effort; and to-day, in our own land at least, her institutions of learning—institutions of all grades and for both sexes—are far more numerous than those of any other religious body.

More than to any other one man is the cause

of temperance indebted to Mr. Wesley. Unless we are mistaken, Mr. Wesley, in the General Rules of his societies, made the first authoritative ecclesiastical utterance upon this subject. His Rule forbids "drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors; or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity."\* This position was taken when the use of intoxicating liquors was no more matter of censure by the Church than the present use of tea or coffee. By reference to one of his sermons—"On the Use of Money"—it will be seen that the great reformer had carefully pondered the whole matter, and had come to conclusions which, even to-day, the Churches in general have not been able to adopt and enforce. "We may not sell anything," he says, "which tends to impair health. Such is eminently all that liquid fire, commonly called drams or spirituous liquors. All who sell them in the common way, to any who will buy, are poisoners-general. They murder his majesty's subjects by

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\*Such was the original Rule. In 1790 the Methodist Episcopal Church changed the Rule to "Drunkenness, or drinking spirituous liquors, unless in cases of necessity." In 1848 the Methodist Episcopal Church restored the words "buying or selling." (Sherman's History of the Discipline, p. 114.)

wholesale; neither does their eye pity or spare; they drive them to hell like sheep." In 1812, near seventy years after the adoption of this Rule by Wesley, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church adopted a report urging its ministers to preach upon the subject, and condemning not only "actual intemperance," but likewise "such habits and indulgences" as lead to intemperance; and in 1833, just ninety years after Wesley's legislation, the first National Temperance Convention was held in Philadelphia. Since that time various measures have been adopted, divers organizations have been formed, and, in several of the States, different forms of prohibitory law have been passed; while in many of the European nations, and even in India and China, the like efforts are making for the extirpation of the evil. Yet even to-day the Churches that arose from Mr. Wesley's Revival are, we believe, the only ones embodying it among their organic laws that both the buying and selling, as well as the drinking, of spirituous liquors shall not be engaged in by their members. A prohibitory law has thus been one of the fundamental principles of the Wesleyan Churches from the beginning. More than this, we believe that, if the



facts in the case were carefully tabulated, it would be found that in the different social or legislative organizations for the suppression of intemperance, the followers of Wesley greatly outnumber those of any other ecclesiastical body; and that, in the ranks of the clergy especially, his preachers have generally excelled both in zeal and number. Without intending any invidious comparisons, we would venture the remark that, if the power now thrown into the various movements for the annihilation or reduction of intemperance by this portion of the Christian world were withdrawn or annulled, the cause would hardly have vitality enough to make a respectable effort for the next half-century.

So far we have considered only the general results of Mr. Wesley's life—results affecting the English and American nations at large, and the progress in them of moral and religious ideas. Let us now take a view of the work accomplished more specifically in behalf of the Church itself.

First, we should see what was the condition of the Church at the time Mr. Wesley entered upon his career of reformation. Nothing could show more clearly the need of the great Revival

than the manner in which, for many years, both the laity and ministry received Mr. Wesley's labors. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that he could have met with no greater discouragement or more determined opposition had he been attempting to Christianize the tribes in the heart of Africa. While he was doing his utmost to benefit both Church and people, both Church and people were subjecting him to the bitterest persecution. He is the last of the world's great reformers who have had to suffer physical injury for the good they have effected. Not only oaths and curses, but stones, clubs, dragging by the hair, trampling in the mire, were no unusual experiences of Wesley and his coadjutors during a large portion of his life. Mobs pelted him with stones; windows were shattered while he preached; men, women, and children were dragged along the streets; and more than once, Wesley himself narrowly escaped with his life. Not only mobs, but magistrates of the law and dignitaries of the Church, joined in these disgraceful deeds. But the most cruel part of all was the persecution arising from false charges, slanderous imputations, and scurrilous attacks from those to whom he would naturally have

turned for friendly aid and sympathy. "Papist," "infidel," "bigot," "heretic," "atheist," were mild expressions of their opposition, on the part of many. "Lurking, sly assassin," "most rancorous hater of the gospel," and like euphonious names, was he called by the saintly Toplady, as he argued questions of grace and salvation and wrote "Rock of Ages!"

Such treatment was not because Wesley was seeking to overthrow cherished doctrines of the Church, or establish new or heretical opinions. His crime was that he endeavored to infuse life into doctrines which the Church had always professed—the old doctrines of the prayer-book and homilies—doctrines for the realization of which in their hearts and lives, both clergy and laity constantly, in solemn style, prayed as they bowed before the altars of the Church. The robed priest and mitred bishop, with the noble lord and lady, could kneel and implore, "O God, the Father; O God, the Son; O God, the Holy Ghost; have mercy upon us, miserable sinners;"\* but when Wesley preached that the "miserable sinners" needed mercy, and must renounce their sins if

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\* The Litany.

mercy they would obtain, his doctrines were contemptuously styled as "most repulsive," "highly offensive and insulting." Bishops, archbishops, and all, could mumble "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me;" or, "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name;" but when Mr. Wesley preached that the people, in order to be saved, must perfectly love God, and worthily magnify his name, he was driven out as an unclean thing, subjected to dishonor and insult, such as could have been looked for only at Billingsgate or in Botany Bay.

No period in the history of the Church has been more repellent than that now under consideration. Bishop Burnet, so often quoted in this connection, declared that he could not look on without the deepest concern when he saw the imminent ruin hanging over the Church, while Southey testifies of "the rudeness of the peasantry, the brutality of the town population, the prevalence of drunkenness, the growth of impiety, the general deadness of religion" as being "obvious and glaring." Green, the English historian, speaks of the clergy as "the idlest and

most lifeless in the world.”\* But after the account given of the general demoralization of the nation, we need say no more as to the condition of the Church. That near the beginning of the present century a change was made for the better, and that the change was due to the influence of John Wesley and his associates, is admitted by all impartial students of the history of those times. George III is said to have confessed, in his old age, that to the brothers John and Charles Wesley, with George Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, the Church of England was more indebted than to all other men.† The philosophic Lecky declares that while the splendid victories by land and sea during the ministry of the elder Pitt make the most dazzling episode in the reign of George II, their importance in English history is but secondary as compared with the work of Whitefield and Wesley.‡

The power of the revival was liberally attested a few years ago when the Ecumenical Methodist Conference met in London. Said the Rev. H.

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\* History of England, IV, 149.

† Overton's Evan. Revival, p. 98.

‡ England in the Eighteenth Century.

Dawson, of the "Baptist Union," in his fraternal address: "We rejoice that you have kindled the lamp of truth in obscure hamlets and villages. . . . We are thankful for your spiritual conservatism, that in every pulpit in this land Christ is preached."\* Said Dr. Kennedy, Congregationalist: "We unite with you in fervent thanksgiving to God for the rich blessing which has rested on the spiritual successes of Wesley, and on the communities which bear his name, or which, without assuming the name, have sprung from the great spiritual movement with which his name is identified."† The testimony of the *Christian Union* (of England) is that "the greatest religious reformation of modern times is unquestionably that wrought by the Methodist denomination. A century and a half ago, religious fervor in England, and we might almost say, religion itself, had well nigh died out. If we wish to know what Wesleyanism has done for England—we might say, for the world—the Methodist Ecumenical Conference, now being held in London, will answer that it has wrought the greatest of all religious reformations,

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\* Proceed. Ecumen. Confer., p. 610. † *Id.*, p. 612.

and has won millions of souls to the kingdom of Christ."\*

Mr. Green, in speaking of the effects of the Revival, has noted only the power exerted upon the better classes of society.† This is doubtless because its influence upon the lower strata is so well known and so generally acknowledged. Mr. Lecky, with his usual comprehensiveness of view, has not failed to do justice to this most prominent feature of Wesley's work: "The doctrines which he taught, the theory of life he enforced, proved themselves capable of arousing, in great masses of men, an enthusiasm of piety which was hardly surpassed in the first days of Christianity, of eradicating inveterate vice, of fixing and directing impulsive natures that were rapidly hastening toward the abyss. It planted a fervid and enduring religious sentiment in the midst of the most brutal and neglected portions of the population; and whatever may have been its vices or its defects, it undoubtedly emancipated great numbers from the fear of death, and imparted a warmer tone to the devotion and a

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\*Proceed. Ecumen. Confer., p. 625.

† History of English People, IV, 149.

greater energy to the philanthropy of every denomination, both in England and the Colonies.”\* From the same author, again, is quoted by the canon of Lincoln the assertion that the Revival “gradually changed the whole spirit of the English Church—infused into it a new life and passion of devotion, kindled a spirit of fervent philanthropy, raised the standard of clerical duty, and completely altered the whole tone and tendency of the preaching of its ministers.”†

In two ways, says Dr. Overton, was this power brought to bear upon the Church: “First, by adding to it a body of most earnest, active, self-denying men, of blameless lives, who would have been an honor to any religious community, and who were deeply attached to what they considered to be the teaching of the Church; and, secondly, by directing the attention of those who held aloof from the movement to truths which had been too much placed in the background.”‡ It must be understood that this effect upon the clergy was largely in spite of themselves; but this only shows to the greater advantage the

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\* Lecky's England, etc, II, 653.

† Overton's Evangelical Revival, p. 143.

‡ *Id.*, p. 144.



power of Mr. Wesley upon his Church and countrymen.

At the beginning of the Revival, almost every clergyman in the kingdom, either directly or indirectly, opposed the movement. Wesley himself assures us that at that time he knew of only ten clergymen in England who preached what he considered evangelical doctrines; and so great was the opposition he encountered that, in a short while, there was scarcely a pulpit into which he was admitted. When, however, some twenty years afterwards, he addressed his circular calling for a union of all who preached these doctrines, the number of such had grown to half a hundred; and he lived to see the day when these doctrines prevailed so widely, and had so wrought upon both the clergy and laity of the Church, that when, as an old man full of years and wisdom, he passed to and fro through the kingdom, his way was thronged with admiring, grateful friends, and more of the pulpits were thrown open to him than he was able to fill, and, as he himself expresses it, "the tables were turned," and he had grown into "an honorable man."

What a fire of zeal he had enkindled! What an array of talent he had set to work! Not to

mention the names of Fletcher, Whitefield, Charles Wesley, Coke, Adam Clarke, Perronet, and others, who actively co-operated with him in his great work, how many there were who, though rejecting his irregular methods, had yet caught his evangelical spirit, and zealously labored for the establishment of a purer, loftier form of religion. Henry, Grimshaw, Berridge, Romaine, Newton, Venn, Scott, Cecil, Milner, Walker, Rowland Hill, and others, along with such among the laity as Lady Huntingdon, Wilberforce, Lords Dartmouth and Teignmouth, Hannah More, and Cowper, all of whom distinguished themselves in the literature of the nation and of the Church, and by their writings—poetical and prose—by their sermons, works of a devotional nature, commentaries on the Scriptures, and histories of the Church, awoke the zeal and fervor of the nation, and advanced religious thought to a level never before attained. Even the Dissenting bodies, which had largely become Arian and Socinian, returned to evangelical principles, both in zeal and doctrine. Formalism, more or less, everywhere gave way to the living truth; “decency” and “order,” so-called, yielded largely to the methods of common sense, and of the love

of God and man, in spreading the gospel over the world.

Lay preaching, in some form or other, has, since the days of Wesley, been no unheard-of thing among all the Churches; extempore preaching has, to a great degree, taken the place of the written and read theological essay; the school-house, the market-place, the hill-side, is now used for a sanctuary, where no "consecrated pile" is to be had, and thus the "groves" have again become "God's temples," as of old. The weekly prayer-meeting; two services on the Sabbath-day, instead of the one of the morning alone; the class-meeting, in at least a modified form, and under different names; and so the watch-night service, the protracted meeting, and the revival,—are not now peculiar to Wesley's followers. The Sabbath-school is an institution of all who worship God, even of the Jews and Romanists; each of the denominations has its publishing-house and literature, its weeklies and quarterlies; evangelists—only a different name for a less regular itinerancy—are sent forth by all, even the Catholics; the standard of ministerial qualification has been practically modified in accordance with the demands of a growing Christian population, and,

as we believe, of reason and the Word of God; and, withal, an enlarged, revived hymnology has made divine service to be more of a true spiritual worship than it has been since the days of David and Asaph, and in the psalmodes of all the Churches the songs of Newton, Beveridge, and others, but especially of the brothers John and Charles Wesley, are almost as familiar as the rhymes of the nursery.

See now the various organizations for Christian enterprise that have risen, more or less directly, either from, or in connection with, the work of Wesley.

The first religious publishing-house, the first Sabbath-school, the first free Medical Dispensary, arose from his labors. The first Tract Society was organized by him and Coke several years before the great Pater-noster Row establishment, which itself was the work of Rowland Hill, a Calvinistic Methodist. The first Bible Society, called the Naval and Military, and afterwards the British and Foreign Bible Society, were, the one directly, the other more distantly, the results of Wesley's efforts. The first Protestant Missionary Society was planned in 1787, numbering among its original subscribers such men as Wilberforce

and the Earl of Dartmouth. The London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society originated, the former in the labors of Melville Horne, one of Wesley's Church of England preachers, the latter in the efforts of John Venn, son of a Methodist minister;\*—all in some sense or degree, the work of Wesley, along with a system of bands, classes, love-feasts, societies, conferences—all of them being somewhat of the nature of mutual spiritual insurance companies, in which each member both gives and receives spiritual strength, warmth, and vitality, such as no other institution of the modern Church has known; a system which, at the time of Mr. Wesley's death, had so grown that it numbered more than five hundred preachers and near one hundred and forty thousand members of societies, and had its organizations in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the Channel Islands, the West Indies, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Prince Edward's Island, Canada, the United States; while to-day, just one hundred years after his death, the societies are fully equipped—now become Churches—in, besides the countries just

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\*Tyerman's Wesley, Vol. I, 11.

named, France, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Africa, India, China, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Japan, Ceylon, New Zealand, and almost every important island of the seas,—making, according to a recent estimate which includes Sunday-school scholars and other attendants upon public worship, about twenty-five millions of the world's population now under the direct influence of Wesley's teachings;\* and the number is growing so rapidly, says Mr. Herrick, that “the statistician and the census-taker can hardly keep their figures up with its progress.”†

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\* Telford's Life of Wesley, p. 363.

† Heretics of Yesterday, p. 295.

#### IV.

##### THE CHAMPION OF FREEDOM.

WE now come to what we consider the most important and the most radical part of the work of Wesley—the most radical, as being the widest departure from established usage; the most important, because, unless we are greatly mistaken, calculated to do more toward the extension over the world of the religion of Jesus, as taught by Jesus himself, than any movement the world has known since the close of the first century.

We refer to Wesley's influence over general habits of theological thought and systems of faith among the Churches. The first thing to be said along here is, that just as French ideas were checked and the English people saved from the revolutionary tendencies of French political agitations by the Wesleyan movement, so was the German theological spirit prevented from working out its legitimate and almost necessary results upon the English and no less upon the American mind. It is by no means an imperti-

ment inquiry, how this was brought about; how England and America escaped that infection of wild, rationalistic thought which has rendered the name of Germany almost synonymous with a lifeless, soulless faith, if not indeed synonymous with irreverence or infidelity itself. This disposition which so broadly marks the German mind—the disposition unduly to exalt rational inquiry at the expense of revealed religion—began, not in Germany, but in England.

Herbert wrote the *Tractatus de Veritate* a century or more before Germany gave birth to writers of a like way of thinking. Herbert, Tindal, Hobbes, had made their systems famous long before either Baumgarten, Michaelis, or Semler had disturbed the faith of the orthodox, and the thought of these English thinkers was far more radical than that of the Germans named. The latter, within the Church and as disciples of Jesus, sought to make religion more conformable, as they supposed, to the natural reason of man, while the English school came out openly, and attacked the very foundations of all revealed truth. And the effect of the writings of these men and of their successors had become most manifest and deleterious about the time of the



organization of Wesley's first Conference. It was about this time that Hume published his famous argument against miracles. It was about this time that Bishop Butler said that "it had come to be taken for granted that Christianity was not so much as a subject of inquiry," and that Montesquieu declared that "there was no religion in England, and that the subject, if mentioned, excited nothing but laughter."

It is no meaningless question, therefore, why England, which was so foremost in atheistic and infidel belief—so far ahead of Germany, both as to time and tendencies—should have so thoroughly, and so almost suddenly too, shown to the world a far different character. What turned the tide, and caused the English mind, all at once as it were, to turn back against the current which had been setting in for a century and a half or more? It is manifest that these questions, answered for England, are answered equally for America. We have no doubt that Mr. Lecky, had the subject presented itself as he was writing the words last quoted from him, would have answered these questions as he did the like when considering the influence of France upon his countrymen. At any rate, one need not hesitate

to give such answer. It was the power of living, practical godliness—"Scriptural holiness"—that so occupied the British mind, and so controlled British thought, as in an almost incredibly short time to have radically changed the British character. It was the preaching, the pastoral oversight, the personal instruction of both young and old, by John Wesley, assisted by his numerous co-workers, both in and out of the Establishment; the unwearied traveling to and fro through the kingdom in the organization of his societies, and the enforcement of supreme love to God and love of neighbor as the sum total of moral and religious life,—it was this, the work of Wesley, that drove back across the Channel the insane political and religious frenzy of the French, and which, while it did much to nullify the anti-Christian influence of the English deists, kept back, across the German Ocean, the rationalism of Semler and his school, and has now, for almost a century, kept English thought to a level of sobriety and consistency in social, political, and religious interests that has made the English government the most stable, her literature the purest, her theology the soundest, her morals the most nearly correct, of all the European nations.

Methodism, by her zeal and fury, offensive as it was to many, presented the counteracting forces, if not of a new faith, at least of a more vivid, realistic conception of the established faith—forces which, beginning with the lower and middle classes and at length working their way upward, eventually carried back the Anglo-Saxon mind to the true idea of the Lutheran reformation, rather than forward with the wild vagaries of French and German thought. Luther himself had not wrought along the line of what is now known as the fundamental principle of Protestantism—"the Bible, the Bible alone, for Protestants." Both he and his followers had only substituted for the authority of Rome the authority of creeds and Diets, and had exalted theological definitions into the place originally held only by the plain teachings of Jesus. It was but natural that the German mind, under this influence, should experience the two extreme reactions of, first, spinning out and weaving theological discussions until the network had strangled the living faith of Jesus; and, secondly, of making a determined intellectual revolt against all authority, both human and divine, in matters of religion. Mr. Wesley's influence counteracted both

these evils, both in England and America—the one, by emphasizing life and character as the all in all of the religion of Jesus; the other, by submitting the sacred Scriptures to the judgment of enlightened reason, guided by reverent faith in God, and refusing to be controlled by traditional faith or ecclesiastical decisions.

John Wesley was the most pronounced advocate of freedom the Church has known since the days of Paul—not freedom as guaranteed by the civil law to those not members of an Established Church, but freedom within the Church, and to be allowed by the Church itself. Freedom as regards the law—equal privileges to all religious bodies—is but a small part of the freedom of the gospel of Christ. The great question now demanding settlement with many is to what extent freedom in belief shall be exercised as regards the teachings of the Church of which one may be a member. Of course, this is a question for the Churches themselves, and not for the civil authorities, to settle. The civil authority has long since, at least in the leading European nations, equally as in the United States, granted the largest freedom it could possibly bestow. What is needed is for the various Churches to determine how far,

notwithstanding their prescribed formulas, each member shall have the privilege of dissent from such formulas, and be master of his own creed. Freedom for the members of any one ecclesiastical body to unite themselves with the members of a different body is fully granted; and the beliefs of the different bodies are fully recognized as evangelical so long as they are confined to the members of these several bodies; but just so soon as a belief prescribed by one body finds its way into a different body—as when, for instance, a member of a Calvinistic Church becomes Arminian in belief, or *vice versa*—the belief becomes a heresy; and until quite recently such a thing could not be endured. Mr. Wesley was the first theologian of whom we know who endeavored to remove this glaring inconsistency, and who himself set the example of calling no man master in the determination of his faith.

There are few greater errors than that which credits Martin Luther with the establishment of religious freedom in the world. Luther did not seek toleration, even before the civil law, of beliefs differing from his own; neither by his followers was more attempted than to free themselves from the dominion of Rome. The princi-

ple of Protestantism, that the Bible alone is the rule of faith to Christian believers, was, in the earlier days of the Reformation, only an assertion of independence of the Romish Church. Freedom in the modern sense seems not to have been dreamed of by Luther ; it was not announced in the theses tacked upon the church-door at Wittenberg ; it was not contended for at the Diet of Spires. The principle there established was, "that each community should be controlled in religious matters by the reigning prince," and it was because of *protest* against the repeal of this sorry semblance of freedom that the friends of the Reformation received the designation by which they are now known. (Mosheim.)

Nowhere in all history is seen less of true religious freedom, or even of toleration, than among the Lutheran Churches of Germany during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Each civil potentate ruled the Church in his own dominions with a despotism equally galling with the tyranny of Rome. And so it was, to greater or less degree, in other nations. In the parts of France which were conceded to the Protestants, the civil power was immediately used to suppress the Romish worship. When the English Govern-

ment manifested a disposition to relax its tyranny over the "banned and proscribed people of Ireland," the Protestant bishops raised a solemn protest, declaring that to give them toleration "was a grievous sin;" while the persecutions of the Non-conformists in Scotland were a shame to human nature; and even our own earlier American annals are far from being stainless as regards such foul enormities. In Sweden, to-day—Sweden, the first of the nations that adopted the principles of the Reformation, and where the Lutheran religion is, in most regards, most nearly what it was in the days of Martin Luther—there is no religious freedom that deserves the name. Within the memory of men still living, and by no means old, a number of ladies were exiled because they had embraced the Romish faith; and we can all bear witness how the world was amazed, not more than half a dozen years ago, that the Evangelical Alliance was not permitted to meet in Stockholm, after the invitation had been given and accepted.

What a contrast between Luther and his followers on the one hand, and John Wesley with his societies on the other! It will be remembered that, as we have shown, Mr. Wesley

passed his life in the Church of England, telling us that while he considered it a sin to separate from the Church, he regarded it no less a sin not to vary from the Church in such matters as his judgment could not approve. In him, therefore, and in the societies under his care, we have the notable instance of more than a hundred thousand of the laity and several hundred preachers of the gospel, all members of the Church, yet all following their own judgments in matters of both faith and practice—Mr. Wesley himself doing all in his power to have them retain their connection with the Church, at the same time encouraging their right to do their own thinking and obey only their own consciences.

At the very outset he lays broad and deep the principle that we are to “think and let think,” and no one idea does he seek more frequently or more diligently to impress upon his people. We have already heard him speak upon the subject; but we can with equal pleasure hear him further: “I do not mean, be of my opinion. You need not. Neither do I mean, I will be of your opinion. I can not; it does not depend upon my choice. I can no more think, than I can see or hear, as I will. . . . I do not mean, embrace



my modes of worship; or, I will embrace yours. This is also a thing which does not depend either on your choice or mine. We must both act as each is fully persuaded in his own mind. Hold you fast that which you believe is most acceptable to God. I will do the same.”\* Hear his definition of religious liberty: “Religious liberty is a liberty to choose one’s own religion; to worship God according to our own consciences. Every man living, as a man, has a right to this, as he is a rational creature. The Creator gave him this right when he endowed him with understanding; and every man must judge for himself, because every man must give an account of himself to God. Consequently, this is an inalienable right; it is inseparable from humanity, and God did never give authority to any man or number of men, to deprive any child of man thereof, under any color or pretense whatever.”† “Be true to your principles touching opinions, and the externals of religion. Use every ordinance which you believe is of God; but beware of narrowness of spirit toward those who use them not. Conform

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\*Sermon on Catholic Spirit.

† Works, XVI, 401. (London, 1809.)

yourselves to those modes of worship you approve, yet love as brethren those who can not conform. Lay so much stress on opinions that all your own, if possible, may agree with truth and reason; but have a care of anger, dislike, or contempt towards those whose opinions differ from yours. Condemn no man for not thinking as you think; let every man enjoy the full and free liberty of thinking for himself; let every one use his own judgment, since every man must give account of himself to God.”\*

It was upon such principles as these that he organized his Conferences. Upon the opening of the first of these (1744), he “desired that all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God; that we meet with a single eye, and as little children who have every thing to learn; that every person may speak freely what is in his heart, and that every question which may arise should be thoroughly debated and settled.” See a portion of the Proceedings of this Conference:

“*Question.* Need we be fearful of doing this—the overturning of our first principles?

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\* Works, V, 253.

“*Answer.* If they are false, the sooner they are overturned, the better. If they are true, they will bear the strictest examination. Let us pray for a willingness to receive new light—to know every doctrine whether it be of God.

“*Question.* How far does each of us agree to submit to the judgment of the majority?

“*Answer.* In speculative things, each can submit only so far as his private judgment shall be convinced. In every practical detail, each will submit so far as he can without wounding his conscience.

“*Question.* Can a Christian submit any farther than this to any man or number of men upon earth?

“*Answer.* It is undeniably certain he can not, either to bishops, Convocations, or General Councils. And this is that broad principle of private judgment on which all the Reformers proceeded. Every man must judge for himself, because every man must give account of himself to God.”\*

But let us see what has been the effect of Mr. Wesley’s life and labors upon the theological thought of the world—upon its creeds and con-

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\* Myles’s Chronological History of Methodism, p. 24.

fessions of faith, and upon the general advancement of the Churches toward the one universal kingdom of God.

The great truths which Wesley made the basis of his Revival were such as the world could not long resist. The supremacy of conscience over authority, of the Word of God over the decisions of Councils, and the superior value of right states of heart and life as compared with established doctrines; eternal life dependent solely upon the sinner's choice, and God's grace freely given to assist that choice; God, loving all mankind; Jesus, dying for all, and actually redeeming every soul that longs for God,—these were just such truths as the unbiased mind naturally believes of God, his Sovereign and Redeemer; just such as, unprejudiced and uncontrolled by adverse authority, one naturally finds in the Word of God; and nothing but a radical change in human nature could have checked their progress in the world. What has been their progress? What course has their progress taken? Truths which awake response in the hearts and convictions of all mankind must not only ultimately command the assent of all, but eventually cause all other truths to sink into comparative insignificance and neg-

lect. In other words, such truths as Wesley preached for more than half a century were bound, in the very nature of things, to bring about these two great results: First, forcing themselves, more or less, into the creeds of all classes of Christian thinkers; and, secondly, promoting unity of faith and a common sympathy among all who adore the same God and Savior. Now, note—whatever may be the written declarations of the various creeds of evangelical Protestantism, the real belief of the evangelical Churches is now essentially one with Wesley's teachings. How unquestionably true is this of the Calvinistic Churches! As expressed in their Confessions, no system of thought could be more at variance with the Arminianism of Wesley; yet as entertained to-day by their ministry and laity, it would be difficult to say wherein the essential difference lies.

Right in the face of the Westminster\* protest against confounding the Divine foreknowledge with predestination; in face, equally, of Calvin's† protest against confounding predestina-

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\* Confession of Faith, chapter iii, 11.

† Institutes, Book III, 23.

tion with the permission of God,—the vast majority of Calvinistic thinkers do thus explain their doctrine, so that real Calvinism rarely appears except as it stands in the written creed, and the prospect is that before long it will have no place there. Within the last decade the Congregational Churches have, by regularly appointed commission, expunged the Calvinistic elements of their faith; the English Presbyterians have determined to revise their Confession; and the present agitation of the subject in the United States is very significant. Says Dr. McCosh, “the most eminent minister and educator in America:” “Our theologians do not accept it [the Confession] as a whole. Among the theological seminaries, some reject one part, some reject another; all reject something.” Dr. Philip Schaff—the great scholar of the American Calvinistic Churches, the highest authority on the subject of creeds—says: “The doctrines of the Confession are not believed by ninety-nine hundredths of the Presbyterians, nor preached by any, so far as I know. They certainly could not be preached in any pulpit without emptying the pews.”

The fact is, the “Five Points” hold about the

same place in the religious faith of the world that the old astronomy holds in the history of science. Long-continued habit makes us still speak of the rising and setting of the sun, but we no longer believe in the phraseology thus employed. And so "predestination," "election," "reprobation," "non-elect infants," are still terms familiar to our eyes and ears, but this is about all that can be said of them; they no longer express the faith at one time associated with them.

Now, it would be somewhat extravagant to assert that this great change of belief is due entirely to the influence of Mr. Wesley; but that his teachings have had much to do in bringing about such change, will hardly be called in question. The "Calvinistic Controversy" was conducted chiefly by Mr. Fletcher on the Arminian side, and by Mr. Whitefield and his friends on the side of the Calvinists, and was of comparatively short duration; yet it aroused attention, as had not been done before, to the inconsistencies of the Calvinistic view, and made men think upon the subject who before had accepted the doctrine upon the authority of the Confession and of the Fathers. And, then, the continual

preaching of the great truths which made the staple of the Wesleyan religion, Sabbath after Sabbath, to hundreds of thousands and, recently, to millions of men and women, has not been without effect upon the whole world of religious thinkers.

Two leading ideas—(1) that man, feeble and sinful as he is, has yet something to do, something which he can and must do, toward his own salvation; and (2) that God has provided redemption for every man, and as a kind, loving Father, desires that every man shall come to him and live forever—have so modified Calvinistic thought that the Westminster fathers, could they return to the earth, would recognize but few of those who profess to keep the “faith once delivered to the saints.” Not unreasonably, therefore, has a living Presbyterian divine\* asked: “What is it that keeps Methodists and Presbyterians apart? Is it anything essential to the Church, or even to its well-being? . . . I am persuaded that our differences are merely intellectual (metaphysical), and not moral or spiritual; in short, not material.”

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\*Dr. Briggs in “Whither?” p. 243.



Not only Calvinists and Arminians, but even those bodies that have differed yet more widely, are evincing a marked tendency toward unanimity of view in all that is really fundamental to the Christian faith. "Whether they be Unitarians or Trinitarians, they are generally one as to this—that Jesus Christ was the ideal and perfect man, whose likeness is the model toward which all are to strive; and, farther, that in his person there was expressed so much of God's own nature as can be revealed under the limitations of human flesh. . . . To all who so regard him, he rightfully becomes, not only a Guide to be wholly trusted, but a Leader to be followed, a Savior to be loved; in life a Divine Friend, and in death a sure hope."\*

As to the natural moral state of man, all are agreed upon the necessity of Divine assistance in overcoming evil; and as to repentance and conversion, there is no variance concerning what the new life is that follows them—this new life being admitted to be the same thing in all who love the Lord Jesus Christ. As to the Holy Scriptures, there is a like agreement in so far as are in-

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\* *Christian Union*, Dec. 3, 1873.

volved essential faith and the true Christian life. There is general acceptance of the Bible as at least containing the word of God, and as being the ultimate standard of appeal; "an incomparable treasury of moral teaching, a transcendent insight into spiritual truth, a veritable disclosure of God to men."

Not only does this tendency to harmony exist, but a most manifest tendency no less to lose sight comparatively of all other truths or doctrines, and to make prominent the one great idea of faith in Jesus Christ as the sole foundation of the Christian life—faith, in the sense of a simple coming to Jesus, using all diligence to keep his commandments, and trusting through his mercy for salvation from sin.

"To found a Church on dogmatic definitions of theology," says the editor of the *Christian Union*,\* "is as alien to the spirit of the New Testament as to found it on allegiance to the bishop of Rome. We shall never get either unity of the Church, or liberty within it, until it is founded on simple allegiance to Jesus Christ as a Divine Teacher, Savior, and Master." The

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\* May 9, 1889.

same writer had but a short while before this said, in answer to the question, How much creed is essential in order to be a disciple of Christ?—"One need believe in nothing except in Christ himself—as one at whose feet he desires to sit, from whose lips he wishes to learn, and whose life and character he is resolved to follow and to imitate." "We are ready to welcome to all the privileges and prerogatives of Church membership any one who, whatever his theological opinions, gives evidence of possessing, or of earnestly choosing, as superior to any other good, the spirit of Christ."

Says Dr. R. D. Hitchcock, late president of the Union Theological Seminary :\* "The question [What is Christianity?] is put and pressed to-day as never before. And sectarian answers are behind the time. No creed of Orient or Occident, ancient or modern, has spoken the final word. Scientific theology still has its errand and its rights. Though the more we refine, the more we differ, the time will come when the more we differ, the more we shall be agreed; differing in the smaller, agreeing in the larger things; far

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\* As quoted by Dr. Briggs in "Whither?" p. 277.

apart in the spreading branches, knit together in the sturdy trunk."

Indeed, for many years these sentiments have prevailed to such an extent that they have practically formed the basis for membership in all the leading Protestant Churches. "Many of the Presbyterian Churches, especially those of Old School origin, admit to lay membership on simple evidence of repentance and faith in Christ, without requiring acceptance of any creed of any kind; long or short."\*

The Baptist Churches admit to membership on the basis of experience of sins forgiven; the Protestant Episcopal Church requires acceptance merely of the Apostles' Creed; the Christian Church,† while very inconsistent in demanding a particular form of baptism, in other matters leaves each one, whether of the laity or of the ministry, to interpret the Scriptures for himself; some of the Congregational Churches require only the evidence of repentance and faith in Jesus. Plymouth Congregational Church prescribes no doctrinal test whatever, but receives

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\* *Christian Union*, March 9, 1889.

† Followers of A. Campbell.

into membership simply upon acceptance of Jesus Christ as a Divine Master and Savior, and consecration of life to his service, and a covenant to walk in fellowship with the Church. Admission into the Methodist Churches has, from their origin, been free to all who "desire to flee from the wrath to come and be saved from their sins."

In consequence of these liberal interpretations of the gospel, the Churches are coming together and co-operating in their efforts to convert the world, as they have never done before. Christian workers in the mission-fields are laboring in union upon only great fundamental principles, and more and more each year is growing the disposition to teach the heathen only the essential, saving truths of the gospel. The term *evangelical* is, without any written or stipulated covenant, used of a large number of Churches, many of whose beliefs in all that is not of the nature of saving faith are as diverse and contradictory as could well be imagined, and fraternal greetings are cordially interchanged when their great representative bodies hold session. Young Men's Christian Associations, composed of all, without regard to creed, who are endeavoring to live the

Christian life or in any way lift themselves to a higher moral plane, are compassing the globe with their reading-rooms and other agencies for good. And the Evangelical Alliance holds its annual sessions in different parts of the world, embracing all whose faith attaches to the great cardinal principles of Christian truth. No less an authority than Dr. Briggs, of Union Theological Seminary, proposes a "General Council of the Church of Christ in America," to be composed of representatives from all the evangelical Churches—the ground or basis for which Council being the grand possibilities in the removal of barriers, stumbling-blocks, causes of friction and strife, and in the furtherance of peace, concord, and Christian love;\* while the Protestant Episcopal Church, having the Church of England as ally in the noble cause, would found a basis of union for all these Churches on terms to which, with but slight modification, all might assent: (1) The Holy Scriptures as the rule and standard of faith; (2) The Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds; (3) Baptism and the Lord's Supper for ordinances; (4) The historic episcopate locally

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\* Whither? p. 237.

adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church. And the House of Bishops has declared that, "in all things of human ordering or human choice, relating to modes of worship and discipline, this Church is ready, in the spirit of love and humility, to forego all preferences of her own."\*

That the declarations here made are not mere rhetorical glow, has been shown by similar exhibitions of broad, unsectarian sentiment on other occasions. At the Congress of Churches a few years ago, at Hartford, a member announcing himself as a High Church Episcopalian, and even a Puseyite—now a bishop in a Western diocese—gave them to understand that he considered the ordination of every minister in the assembly just as valid as his own. The president of the Council, also an Episcopalian, declared that the Episcopalians must soon come to an exchange of pulpits with the other Churches; while at the late Lambeth Conference, composed of Episcopalian bishops from all parts of the world,

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\* *Christian Union*, Dec. 26, 1889.

the question of exchange of pulpits was formally raised and voted upon. The measure was lost by an overwhelming majority, but not until it had received the support of the bishops of Zealand and Ripon of the English Church, and of Bishops Whipple and Potter of our own country.\*

At the recent Council of the Plymouth Church, met for the installation of Dr. Abbott to the pastorate, Dr. E. W. Donald declared: "I want to say in the most explicit terms—in words that can by no means be twisted into something that they do not mean—that I stand as an Episcopalian minister and High Churchman, if you please to call me so, and I extend to Dr. Abbott and Dr. Bliss my greetings, as ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ, in every respect spiritually competent to preach the Word of God and to administer the two sacraments which alone belong to the Church." †

The Council here referred to is one of the most significant facts in the history of the Church of Christ. It was composed of distinguished representatives from six leading Protestant denominations—Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, Re-

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\* *Christian Union*, Dec. 26, 1889. † *Id.*, Jan. 23, 1890.



formed, Methodist, and Congregational—all of whose doctrines, except as to great cardinal points, differed from each other and from those of the pastor whom they were to install, as widely as they differed from some of the dogmas of Rome herself; and yet, agreeing upon the broad basis of faith in Jesus Christ and consecration to his cause, every member of the Council, with a single exception, gave the right hand of Christian fellowship to the pastor, many of them making elaborate speeches of congratulation, all of them advising the Church to proceed with the installation, though they had just listened to a declaration of faith, which, in the days of their childhood, had closed against its professor the doors of any evangelical Church in Christendom. "The Council in this respect," says the editor of the *Christian Union*, "emphasizes what is far more important than any mere theological departure; namely, the catholicity which cordially recognizes the right of private judgment in the ministry, within lines of personal loyalty to Christ and consecration to his work."

All of which, from the first quotation from Dr. Briggs, is but a varied way of saying what John Wesley had already said one hundred years

ago: "We believe, indeed, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and infidels. We believe the written Word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church. We believe Christ to be the Eternal and Supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think."\* As to erroneous opinions being entertained: "It matters not whether they are or not. (I speak of such opinions as do not strike at the root.) It is scarce worth while to spend ten words about it. Whether they embrace this religious opinion or that, is no more concern to me than whether they embrace this or that system of astronomy. Are they brought to holy tempers and holy lives? This is mine, and should be your inquiry."

"It is no little sin to represent trifles as necessary to salvation. . . . Among these

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\* Works, V, 240.

we may undoubtedly rank orthodoxy, or right opinions."

"There may be some well-meaning persons . . . who aver . . . that if they have not clear views of those capital doctrines—the fall of man, justification by faith, and the atonement made by the death of Christ and of his righteousness transferred to them—they can have no benefit from his death. I dare in no wise affirm this. Indeed, I do not believe it. I believe the merciful God regards the lives and tempers of men more than their ideas. I believe he respects the goodness of the heart, rather than clearness of the head; and that if the heart of a man be filled (by the grace of God and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, because his ideas are not clear, or because his conceptions are confused."\*

"We do not lay the main stress of our religion on any opinions, right or wrong; neither do we willingly join in any dispute concerning them."

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\* Works, II, 485.

“One circumstance is quite peculiar to the people called Methodists; that is, the terms upon which any person may be admitted into their society. They do not impose, in order to their admission, any opinions whatever. Let them hold particular or general redemption, absolute or conditional decrees; let them be Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Independents,—it is no obstacle. The Presbyterian may be a Presbyterian still; the Independent or Anabaptist may use his own mode of worship. So may the Quaker, and none will contend with him about it. They think, and let think. One condition, and one only, is required—a real desire to save their souls.”\*

“The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of opinions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another, are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever, therefore, imagines that a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion, is grossly ignorant of the whole affair—he mistakes the truth wholly. . . .

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\* Works, VII, 321.

By the fruits of a living faith do we labor to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world—from all those whose minds or lives are not according to the gospel of Christ. But from real Christians, of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all; not from any who sincerely follow after what they know they have not yet attained. No; who-soever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother. And I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that we be in no wise divided among ourselves. Is thy heart right as my heart is with thine? I ask no farther question. If it be, give me thy hand. For opinions or terms, let us not destroy the work of God. Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough. I give thee the right hand of fellowship. If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, let us strive together for the faith of the gospel, walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; remembering there

is one Body and one Spirit, even as we are called with one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”\*

Truly says Dr. Bradford: “To-day the Jesus who walked among the hills and valleys of Palestine has more followers than ever; and to-day his words, ‘He that is not against us is for us,’ have more weight than ever. Christians now do not quarrel about his divinity, thus denying it; they do not waste time over the hopeless question of how God and man can be one and the same; in the midst of so many mysteries they expect that the unparalleled personality of Jesus Christ will also be mysterious. And they are bowing before the blood-stained cross of the Savior of the world, crying, ‘Master, we will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.’”†

The Wesleyan Revival is generally admitted to have been the most important religious movement of the *eighteenth century*, but we have not been able to see why this limitation should be

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\* Works, Vol. V, 240, 245.

† *Christian Union*, December 26, 1890.

made. We have no record of any other movement, since the original apostolic labors, which has exceeded it either in magnitude or in the character of its results. The revolt of Luther against the Church of Rome was in opposition to a stronger and more dangerous power, and was attended with more noise and demonstration among the nations, as being a more violent disruption of the old condition of things; but we do not consider it an extravagant assertion that a candid comparison of the two movements would give the advantage, in many regards, to that of Wesley. Luther himself is said to have complained on his dying bed, that while the people had been reformed as to their beliefs, they had not been reformed in their lives and tempers, which was equivalent to a confession that, so far as real religion was concerned, the world was but little or none the better for his having lived and labored. That true religion, improvement in heart and life, came afterwards, as an indirect result of Luther's work, is a fact too patent to call for statement; but the unprejudiced reader of history must confess that neither in Germany nor elsewhere was the moral and spiritual condition, either of the Churches or of the nations,

much improved until several generations after Luther; and when at length the improvement came, it was brought about by Wesley and his associates.

The only argument we make in support of a statement, apparently so hyperbolic, is an appeal to facts given on preceding pages, and a repetition, with emphasis, that the work of Wesley was the revival of true religion, personal consecration to God, and a holy life, as distinguished from all regard for rites or doctrines. Viewed in this light, where shall we find a greater work than that of Wesley? Where find a religious movement that has conferred greater blessings upon the Church, or upon the world at large? We have seen the low ebb to which religion in the English Church had fallen at the time Wesley began his course, and we have no reason for believing that in any other land the state of the Church was any the less discouraging. So far as regards religion—religion as contrasted with mere moral life on the one hand, and mere dogma or ecclesiasticism on the other—we would find it difficult, if indeed at all possible, to point to any period, or to any country, in which there was a better state of things than in



England during the first third of the eighteenth century. Review the ages preceding the days of which we now speak. Go back through the licentious and turbulent reigns of the House of Stuart; the bitter theological strifes and bloody persecutions of the Tudor dynasty; the exterminating wars of the Roses, and the long century of conflict between the French and English kings,—and we find ourselves passing into the midst of the darkest era, whether for England or the rest of the world, of which history has preserved the record. The deeper now we penetrate into this period, the thicker, grosser, becomes the darkness, until we come to the days immediately succeeding the apostolic fathers, or perhaps the apostles themselves. Where, in this long course of centuries, shall we see any more of the religious life than Wesley saw in England? Where or when shall we find one who did more than he to spread abroad and establish in the world the true idea of the religion of Jesus, and the practice of its precepts? If history tells us of such a one, we can not recall the fact. Impartial consideration of the subject will show that, since the deaths of Paul and John, the world has had no one that has done so much as Wesley to clear

religion of its errors, its human additions and corruptions; so much to show the true relation of doctrines to practical life, and the relative values of the various doctrines; so much to discriminate between essential and non-essential truth or error, to set in true light the rights of the individual conscience, to arouse dormant zeal, inspire broad philanthropic charity toward all mankind; so much to make religion rational, comprehensive, and practical, as well as devising a wonderfully successful method of sending it abroad throughout the world, and bringing the nations into the kingdom of God.

A bird's-eye view of the work of Wesley, as seen to-day, may now be taken.

Considered apart from the failings and infirmities of many of those who represent it before the world—failings and infirmities which must be expected, in some degree, wherever men are found—*considered as the system which Mr. Wesley designed and preached*, we see:

A religion which seeks to control the heart and life into practical obedience to the law of God; making men not only better Churchmen but better citizens, better men of business, better neighbors; better husbands, fathers, brothers,

friends; better in all spheres and relations of life; esteeming all doctrines as of little worth except as they make men, women, and children—especially the poor, the ignorant, and the depraved—happier, wiser, better.

A religion high above all rites, dogmas, or forms of polity; centering itself wholly upon simple faith in Jesus; recognizing the true Christian character of every sect that worships Jesus, and of every man who seeks to live as Jesus taught, and opening wide its portals to all, of whatsoever class or creed, who are willing to prove such purpose, *first*, by “doing no harm, . . . especially that which is most generally practiced,” and, *secondly*, by “doing good . . . of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all men.”

A religion which recognizes the right of every man to interpret for himself the Scriptures of God, fixing the responsibility for life and doctrine upon the individual conscience; teaching that “no man, or number of men, can decide for others,” and that every man must give account for his belief, not to Church, Conference, or Synod, but to God; submitting to authority “in speculative things,” “only so far as his judgment shall be convinced;” “in practical matters,”

“so far as he can without wounding his conscience.”

A religion which has so wrought upon the world at large that almost every government of the earth has, in some form, felt its power. Prison reform, temperance reform, popular education, care for the poor and friendless, abolition of slavery and of the slave-trade, universal suffrage, and equal rights of all to share the government, along with divers political, social, and humanitarian reforms, are now working out most beneficial results among all the leading nations; and besides all this,—

A religion from which have arisen three immense ecclesiastical bodies, with numbers of smaller ones that have sprung from them, reckoning their memberships by millions, in all portions of the globe; fully equipped with rules of discipline, institutions of learning, missionary societies, and divers other agencies of good; the largest ecclesiastical bodies known to history that have made their way from the beginning without State patronage; the only ones whose fundamental law provides each congregation with a pastor and every pastor with a flock, at the same time sending out shepherds into the waste places to gather

into flocks and folds the scattered sheep that have no shepherd; the only ones, since the first schism from Rome, that have originated in the effort to make men better, rather than more orthodox or more or less ritualistic; the only ones whose requirement of the ministry, as regards belief, is the sole condition of a vow to "instruct the people" committed to their care, and to "teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which they themselves shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scriptures."\*

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\*Methodist Discipline—Ordination of Elders.

The End.

